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OCTOBER 25, 2025 • BILLBOARD.COM

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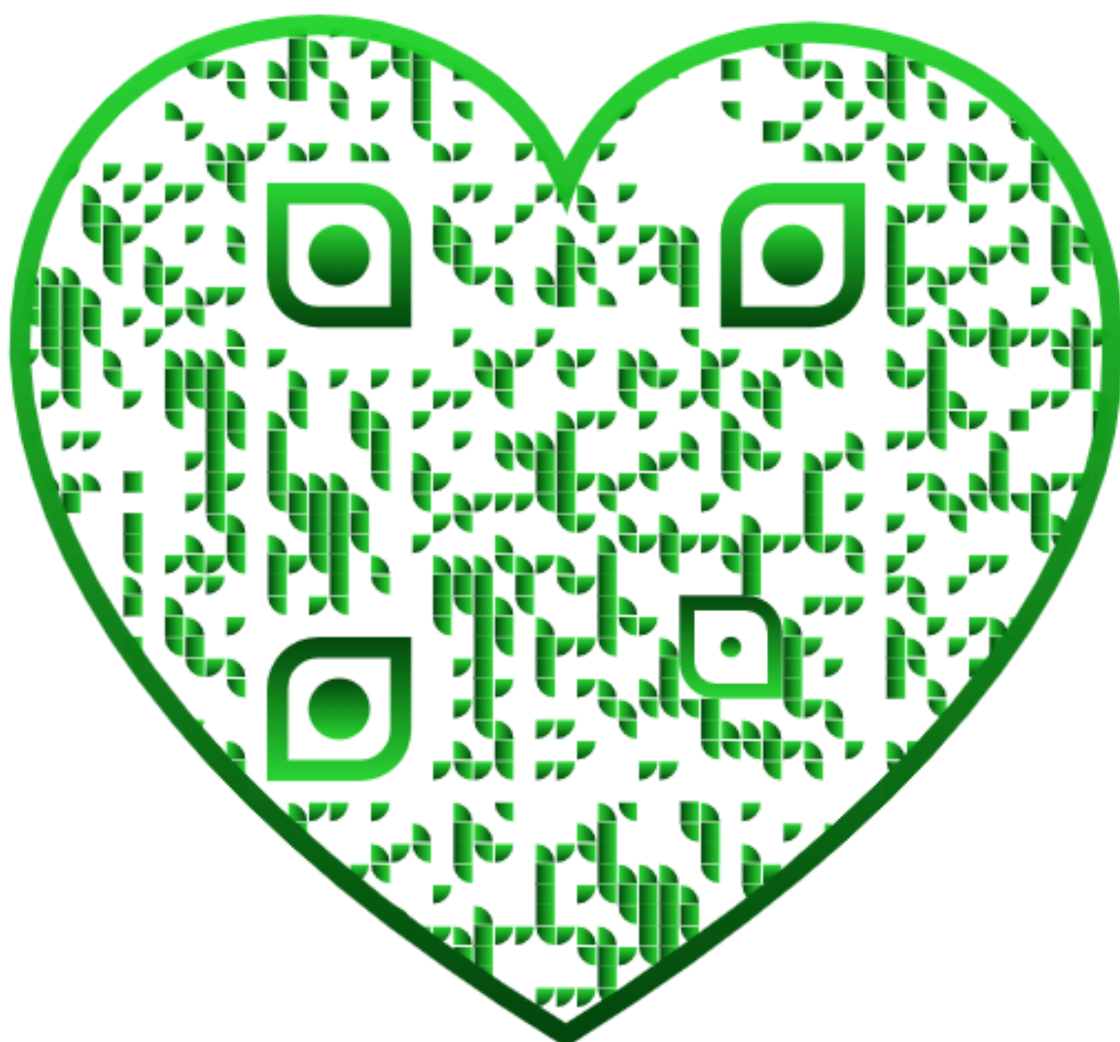
RAUL
ALEJANDRO

LIVE MUSIC'S
POWER PLAYERS

THE PROMOTER,
BEHIND BEYONCÉ,
LADY GAGA & OASIS

HOW WARPED
TOUR WON

WHY AI TRACKS
ARE SELLING



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2025

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THE ESTATE OF MICHAEL JACKSON

contents

OCT. 25, 2025

VOLUME 137

NO. 16

ON THE COVER

Rauw Alejandro onstage at MEO Arena in Lisbon, Portugal, on July 9.

THIS PAGE

Rauw Alejandro at United Center in Chicago on May 9.

TO OUR READERS

Billboard will publish its next issue on Nov. 15. For 24/7 music coverage, go to [billboard.com](https://www.billboard.com).



Features 34

RAUW'S WORLD

Reggaetón star **Rauw Alejandro** transported audiences to salsa's golden age on his *Cosa Nuestra* tour — a high-concept smash that cemented his status as one of the global arena circuit's most exciting new headliners.

44

TOURING POWER PLAYERS

Billboard honors **Arthur Fogel**, **Kevin Lyman** and other executives leading the live-music sector while also diving into the world's biggest touring stories from artificial intelligence and concert production to sustainability and merch. Plus: **Usher**, **Shakira** and **LeAnn Rimes**.



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Billboard 2025 Legend of Live Honoree

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Billboard 2025 Touring Power Players

contents

OCT. 25, 2025 / VOLUME 137 / NO. 16



MASTHEAD

6

BILLBOARD CHARTS

11

Taylor Swift's record-breaking *The Life of a Showgirl* continues atop the Billboard 200; album opener "The Fate of Ophelia" holds at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

THE MARKET

25

A closer look at the figures behind the spectacular opening for *The Life of a Showgirl*, which accounted for over half the U.S. current album market in its debut week.

28

Why several tracks assisted by artificial intelligence have landed on *Billboard's* charts.

THE PLAYERS

79

TOP MUSIC BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Billboard's annual list that highlights the colleges and universities providing the next generation of executives — and artists — with the skills to achieve industry success.

FOR THE RECORD

92

Every Halloween, vampires, werewolves and zombies sink their teeth into the Hot 100 for a spell. Cast an eye upon the graveyard smashes, thriller nights and legal nightmares covered in *Billboard's* back pages — if you dare.

Arthur Fogel photographed by Joel Barhamand on Sept. 18 at Live Nation in Los Angeles.

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from everyone at

ONEFINIXLIVE

charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 10.25.2025

Showgirl Shines In The Spotlight

TAYLOR SWIFT'S *The Life of a Showgirl* remains at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 with 338,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending Oct. 16. A week earlier, the set, released Oct. 3, scored a record-shattering start with 4.002 million units — the most since Luminate data began powering the chart in 1991. It sold 101,000 in its second week, after it debuted with a modern-era record of 3.48 million in album sales.

The previous highs belonged to Adele's 2015 album, 25, which launched with 3.482 million first-week units, with 3.378 million in album sales.

The Life of a Showgirl became Swift's 15th Billboard 200 No. 1, breaking a tie with Drake and Jay-Z for the most among soloists. Overall, only The Beatles (19) have more.

Swift also holds atop the Billboard Hot 100 with album opener and promoted single "The Fate of Ophelia," her 13th No. 1 on the chart. It drew 49.1 million official streams and 42.2 million radio airplay audience impressions and sold 11,000 Oct. 10-16, after it amassed 92.5 million streams Oct. 3-9 — the most for a song in a single week since all YouTube user-generated content was removed from chart calculations in September 2020.

All 12 songs from *The Life of a Showgirl* rank in the Hot 100's top 14 spots, with eight in the top 10. The week before, the album became the first to have all of its tracks place from the top of the chart on down.

—KEITH CAULFIELD AND GARY TRUST

BILLBOARD 200

1

The Life of a Showgirl
Taylor Swift

LAST WEEK

1

PEAK POSITION

1

WEEKS ON CHART

2

Hot 100											
2 WKS. AGO		LAST WEEK		THIS WEEK		Title		Artist		PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
						PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)		IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL			
-	1	1	#1 for 2 WEEKS	SAL	The Fate Of Ophelia	Taylor Swift	1	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	2	2	Opalite			Taylor Swift	2	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
1	13	3	AIR	Golden			HUNTR/X: EJAE, Audrey Nuna & REI AMI	1	17	IDO,24,TEDDY,I.EISENDRATH (EJAE,M.SONNENBLICK,J.KWAK,Y.H.LEE,24,TEDDY)	VISVA/REPUBLIC
2	14	4	Ordinary			Alex Warren	1	36	A.YARON (A.WARREN,A.YARON,C.SHAPIRO,MAGS DUVAL)	ATLANTIC	
-	3	5	Elizabeth Taylor			Taylor Swift	3	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	4	6	Father Figure			Taylor Swift	4	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,G.MICHAEL)	REPUBLIC	
-	6	7	Wi\$h Li\$t			Taylor Swift	6	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	5	8	Wood			Taylor Swift	5	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	8	9	The Life Of A Showgirl			Taylor Swift	8	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	7	10	Actually Romantic			Taylor Swift	7	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	10	11	Cancelled!			Taylor Swift	10	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	9	12	Eldest Daughter			Taylor Swift	9	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	11	13	Ruin The Friendship			Taylor Swift	11	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
-	12	14	Honey			Taylor Swift	12	2	MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,MAX MARTIN,SHELLBACK)	REPUBLIC	
5	15	15	Daisies			Justin Bieber	2	14	C.LANG,D.IJON,MK.GEE,E.BENJAMIN,DYLAN WIGGINS,D.CHETRIT (J.D.BIEBER,D.DUENAS,D.CHETRIT,T.JESSO JR.,M.T.GORDON,C.LANG,E.BENJAMIN,DYLAN WIGGINS)	JRC/ILH/DEF JAM/REPUBLIC	
8	16	16	I Got Better			Morgan Wallen	7	22	J.MOI (M.C.WALLEN,M.W.HARDY,C.MCGILL,B.PENDERGRASS,E.K.SMITH,CHARLIE HANDSOME,J.S.REEVES)	MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	
12	20	17	Man I Need			Olivia Dean	12	8	Z.NAHOME (O.L.DEAN,T.JESSO JR.,Z.NAHOME)	POLYDOR/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	
11	18	18	Mutt			Leon Thomas	11	37	L.THOMAS,FAXXONLY,P.L.JOHNSON (L.G.THOMAS III,R.E.FAIRFAX III,L.A.CAMEJO,P.L.JOHNSON)	EZMNY/MOTOWN/INTERSCOPE CAPITOL	
7	19	19	Soda Pop			Saja Boys: Andrew Choi, Neckwav, Danny Chung, Kevin Woo & samUIL Lee	3	16	24,DOMINSUK,I.EISENDRATH (VINCE,KUSH,D.Y.CHUNG)	VISVA/REPUBLIC	
10	21	20	Your Idol			Saja Boys: Andrew Choi, Neckwav, Danny Chung, Kevin Woo & samUIL Lee	4	17	24,IDO,I.EISENDRATH (EJAE,M.SONNENBLICK,VINCE,KUSH)	VISVA/REPUBLIC	

Go to the Chart Beat section of [billboard.com](#) for complete charts coverage.



Aarons, 31, is a co-writer on Tame Impala's "Dracula," which also rises to a new No. 7 high on Hot Rock & Alternative Songs.

HOT 100

59

"Dracula"

Tame Impala

How did "Dracula" come together?
SARAH AARONS There are so many iterations of what it was. There was this one song that was what the chorus is — I call it the chorus, [Tame Impala's Kevin Parker] calls it the pre-chorus — (*Sings.*) "In the end, I hope it's you and me," and we'd worked on that a couple years ago. One day, he just sent me the (*Sings.*) "Run from the sun like Dracula," and then he mashed that into that one line from this other idea. It was piece by piece. We had so many moments where he'd be like, "The verse is bothering me." And I'd be like, "OK, cool, let's get into it."

What's it like to work with an artist so heavily involved on the production side of things?
It's so much easier. Everything sounds so much like him. It's not easy to get a lyric past him. He has to feel the thing or it will not go in the song, whether it's production, lyrics, melodies — anything. I love that because [he's] making me have to really think about what is best for [him]. It's not a song for everyone. It's a song for [*him*]. He's expressing himself in so many aspects of the songs. When you're with an artist and it's like, "Oh, let's get the producer to do (*Mimics the sound of a beat.*)" it's so many cooks. With him, he's just doing his thing.

You co-wrote two other songs from his new album, *Deadbeat*. Does it help to work with an artist on multiple tracks from a project versus a one-off in terms of finding the right voice?
I totally feel that way. Every once in a while, you get one day with someone and it's so hard. You're just not built to be like that collaboratively, to me. I think having multiple songs is more a result of the fact that we had fun making shit. If he ever got stuck, he'd just be like, "Fuck it, I'm calling Sarah." I also heard everything else [*on Deadbeat*] because we would just chill in the studio and play stuff. Also, knowing the person really well: I've noted that all of my biggest songs the last few years have been people I'm super close with. Music's supposed to be fun. There's a reason I'm not an accountant.

—JOSH GLICKSMAN

HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS			
Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart			
ARTIST	SONG	DEBUT POSITION	DEBUT DATE
Jisoo	"Eyes Closed" with Zayn	72	Oct. 25

BILLBOARD HOT 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

#1 ALBUM DEBUT OF ALL-TIME

4 MILLION SOLD FIRST WEEK

#1 ALBUM BILLBOARD 200

BREAKS RECORD FOR MOST #1 ALBUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY (15)

FIRST ARTIST TO SIMULTANEOUSLY DEBUT #1 US BOX OFFICE, BILLBOARD 200 & HOT 100

EXTENDS RECORD FOR FEMALE ARTIST WITH MOST #1 ALBUMS IN BILLBOARD 200 HISTORY

EXTENDS RECORD AS ARTIST WITH MOST CONSECUTIVE #1 STUDIO ALBUMS ON BILLBOARD 200 (15)

TAYLOR SWIFT NOW HOLDS FOUR OF THE TOP 10 CONSUMPTION DEBUTS OF ALL-TIME

EXTENDS RECORD FOR MOST WEEKS AT #1 ON BILLBOARD 200 FOR A SOLOIST (87)

7TH TIME DEBUTING #1 BILLBOARD HOT 100 AND BILLBOARD 200 AT THE SAME TIME

'THE FATE OF OPHELIA' 13TH #1 SINGLE BILLBOARD HOT 100

FIRST ALBUM IN HISTORY WITH ALL ITS SONGS APPEARING UNINTERRUPTED ON BILLBOARD HOT 100 FROM #1 ON DOWN

"...ANOTHER TRIUMPH FOR THE ULTIMATE SHOWGIRL."
USA TODAY

★★★★★
ROLLING STONE

NEW YORK TIMES
CRITICS PICK

"TAYLOR SWIFT AS WESTERN POP'S DEFINITIVE PRESENCE, THE STAR THAT COULDN'T BE DIMMED."
NPR

"THE LIFE OF A SHOWGIRL IS ONE OF THE MOST GROUNDED, WELL-ROUNDED PROJECTS OF SWIFT'S CAREER."
BILLBOARD

"IT IS A COMBINATION OF COMPELLING SONGWRITING AND WHIP-SMART PRODUCTION THAT EASILY CLEARS THE HIGH BAR SWIFT HAS SET FOR HERSELF."
BBC

BREAKS RECORD FOR BIGGEST OVERALL SALES WEEK IN NIELSEN HISTORY (CONSUMPTION)

JOINS 'MIDNIGHTS' AND 'THE TORTURED POETS DEPARTMENT' AS THE ONLY THREE ALBUMS IN HISTORY TO OCCUPY THE HOT 100 TOP 10

#1 ALL-TIME VINYL DEBUT IN HISTORY WITH 1M+ UNITS SOLD FIRST WEEK

TAYLOR SWIFT HOLDS THE ENTIRE TOP 5 BIGGEST VINYL DEBUTS IN NIELSEN HISTORY

'THE FATE OF OPHELIA' #1 WEEKLY STREAMS FOR ANY SONG IN SPOTIFY HISTORY

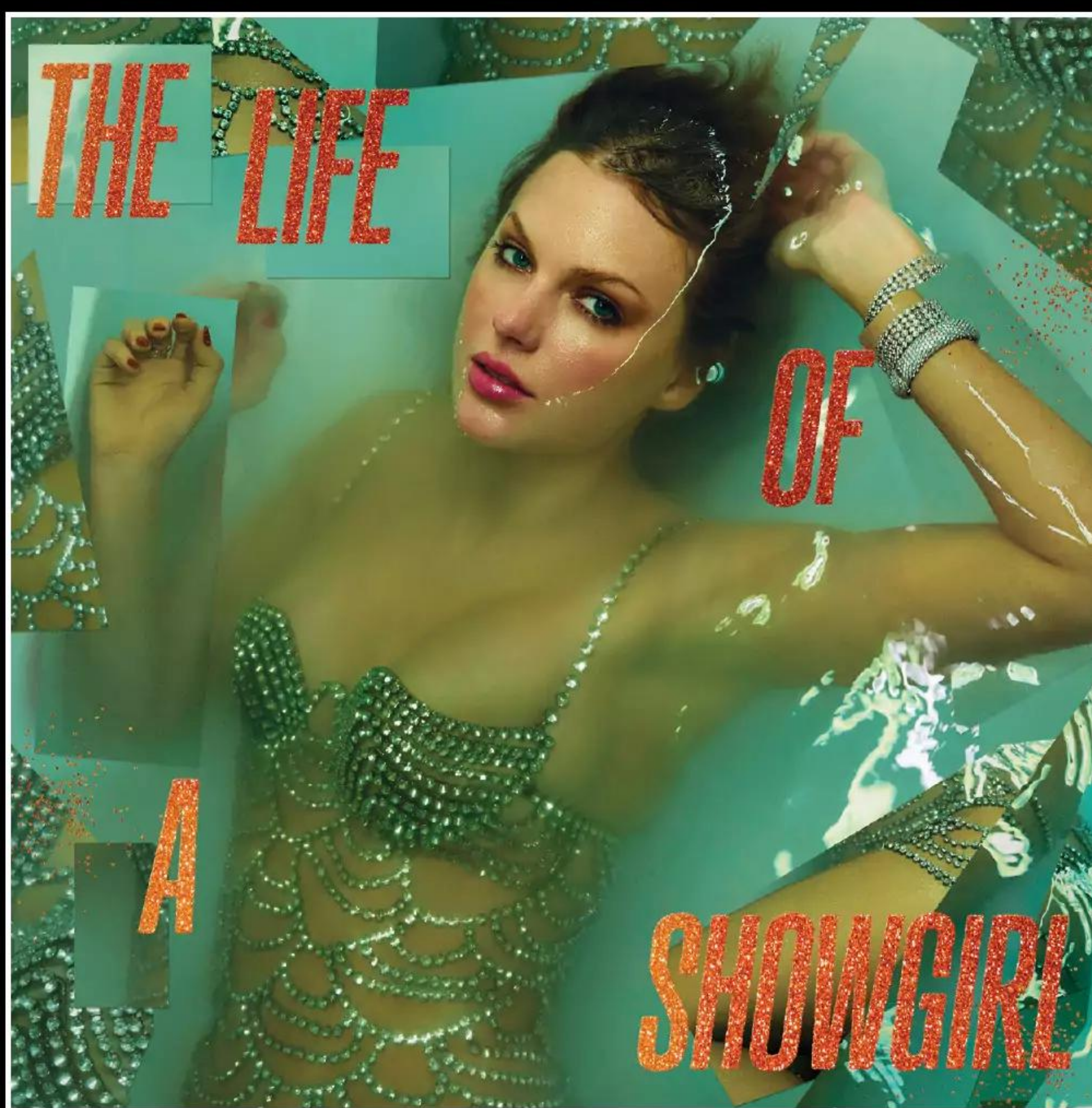
TAYLOR SWIFT HOLDS THE TOP 19 BIGGEST SONG DEBUTS IN SPOTIFY HISTORY

TAYLOR SWIFT HOLDS THE TOP 4 BIGGEST ALBUM DEBUTS IN SPOTIFY HISTORY

'THE FATE OF OPHELIA' FASTEST SONG TO SURPASS 100 MILLION STREAMS IN SPOTIFY HISTORY

TAYLOR SWIFT EXTENDS RECORD FOR MOST #1 SINGLES IN US ITUNES HISTORY (70)

HELD ENTIRE TOP 12 ON GLOBAL APPLE MUSIC SINGLES CHART EVERY DAY DURING FIRST WEEK OF RELEASE



FIRST ARTIST TO SELL OVER 10 MILLION IN US ALBUM CONSUMPTION IN 2025

#1 BEST-SELLING ARTIST OF THE YEAR IN THE US BY TOTAL ALBUM CONSUMPTION IN 2025

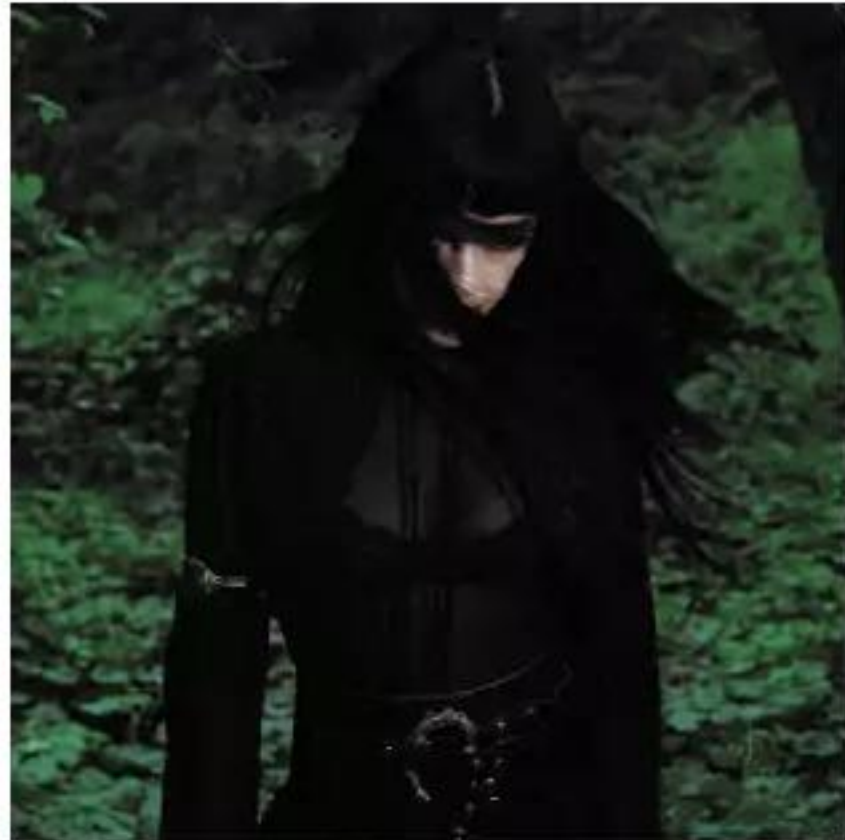
BREAKS RECORD FOR #1 PURE SALES WEEK IN NIELSEN HISTORY

#1 BEST-SELLING ALBUM BY US PURE SALES IN 2025 AFTER LESS THAN ONE DAY ON SALE

republic
records

BILLBOARD 200

13



Not for Radio
Melt

The Marias frontwoman María Zardoya’s solo debut project as Not for Radio also arrives at No. 2 on both the Top Rock & Alternative Albums and Top Album Sales charts.

21



Jason Aldean
30 Number One Hits

Aldean’s first best-of collection boasts all 25 of his No. 1s on the Country Airplay chart and marks his 13th top 10 release on Top Country Albums.

73



Nine Inch Nails
TRON: Ares (Soundtrack)

The album reenters concurrent with the film’s opening in U.S. theaters on Oct. 10, while its lead single, “As Alive As You Need Me To Be,” holds at its No. 2 high on Alternative Airplay.

6

Olivia Dean
The Art of Loving



Olivia Dean’s *The Art of Loving* continues to ascend the Billboard 200 following its debut at No. 8 two weeks ago. After rising to No. 7 in its second week, it climbs to No. 6 on the current chart. The project is the singer-songwriter’s second studio album but her first to reach the Billboard 200.

The Art of Loving is only the third album this year to debut in the top 10 and rise to a new peak in a later week, following the *KPop Demon Hunters* soundtrack (No. 8 debut and reached No. 1 in its 12th week) and Bad Bunny’s *DeBí Tirar Más Fotos* (No. 2 debut and reached No. 1 a week later).

Meanwhile, Dean’s breakout single, “Man I Need,” enters at No. 40 on the Radio Songs chart while rising 20-17 on the Billboard Hot 100.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
-	(1)	1	#1 for 2 WEEKS Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	The Life Of A Showgirl	1	2
1	2	2	GG Soundtrack VISVA/REPUBLIC	KPop Demon Hunters	1	17
2	3	3	Morgan Wallen BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	I'm The Problem	1	22
3	4	4	Cardi B ATLANTIC/AG	Am I The Drama?	1	4
5	5	5	Sabrina Carpenter ISLAND/REPUBLIC	Man's Best Friend	1	7
(8)	7	6	Olivia Dean POLYDOR/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	The Art Of Loving	6	3
(10)	(6)	7	Bad Bunny RIMAS	Debi Tirar Mas Fotos	1	41
12	9	8	SZA TOP DAWG/RCA	SOS	1	149
11	8	9	Alex Warren ATLANTIC/AG	You'll Be Alright, Kid	5	47
13	10	10	Morgan Wallen BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	One Thing At A Time	1	137
HOT SHOT DEBUT		11	TWICE JYP/IMPERIAL/REPUBLIC	Ten: The Story Goes On	11	1
(18)	14	12	Noah Kahan MERCURY/REPUBLIC	Stick Season	2	151
NEW		13	Not For Radio NICE LIFE/ATLANTIC/AG	Melt	13	1
21	(11)	14	Sabrina Carpenter ISLAND/REPUBLIC	Short n' Sweet	1	60
(17)	15	15	Tate McRae RCA	So Close To What	1	34
25	19	16	Billie Eilish DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/INTERSCOPE CAPITOL	Hit Me Hard And Soft	2	74
20	17	17	Morgan Wallen BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	249
19	16	18	sombr SMB/WARNER	I Barely Know Her	10	8
32	(20)	19	Fleetwood Mac WARNER/RHINO	Rumours	1	655
(15)	13	20	Taylor Swift REPUBLIC	The Tortured Poets Department	1	78

SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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ARTIST 100

45

D'Angelo

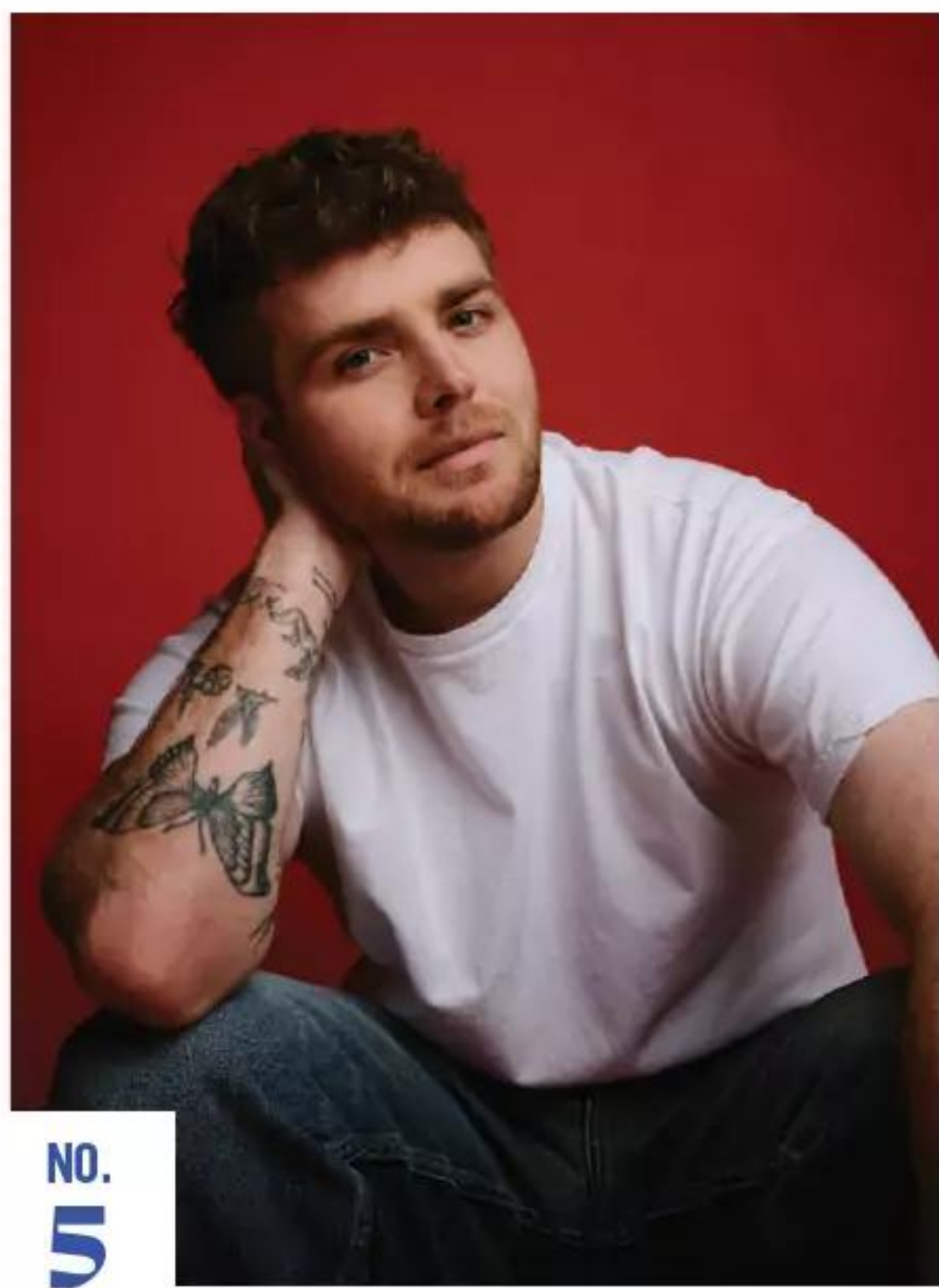
WEEKS ON CHART

5

The late D'Angelo ranks at No. 45 on the Billboard Artist 100 as fans revisited the visionary neo-soul singer-songwriter-producer's catalog after he died of cancer

on Oct. 14 at age 51. His songs earned 16.1 million official on-demand streams in the United States Oct. 10-16, according to Luminate, a week-over-week vault of 796%.

—TREVOR ANDERSON



NO.
5

'Ordinary' Atop AC

"Ordinary" by Alex Warren (above) hits No. 1 on Adult Contemporary with 11.3 million in audience. His first leader on the list also claims an 18th week atop the all-format Radio Songs chart, up 1% to 78.5 million in reach — a new weekly best for the track. It ties for the third-longest command in the latter ranking's 35-year history, matching the leading runs of Miley Cyrus' "Flowers" (2023) and Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris" (1998). Only Shaboozey's "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" (27 weeks, 2024-25) and The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" (26 weeks, 2020) have led longer.

—GARY TRUST



NO.
8

TWICE's Latest Chapter

TWICE returns to the Artist 100 as the pop act's new album, *Ten: The Story Goes On*, arrives at No. 11 on the Billboard 200 and No. 2 on Top Album Sales. The set starts with nearly 26,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending Oct. 16. Of that sum, 88% (nearly 23,000) was in album sales, largely from six CD variants. On the Billboard 200, the group adds its eighth top 40-charting project. On Top Album Sales, it's TWICE's eighth to reach the top two, with four having hit No. 1.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

DATA FOR WEEK OF 10.25.2025

Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
9	①	1	#1 for 126 WEEKS Taylor Swift	REPUBLIC	1	586
1	2	2	Morgan Wallen	BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	345
2	3	3	Sabrina Carpenter	ISLAND/REPUBLIC	1	98
4	4	4	HUNTR/X: EJAE, Audrey Nuna & REI AMI	VISVA/REPUBLIC	2	16
10	6	5	Alex Warren	ATLANTIC/AG	4	41
⑧	7	6	Tate McRae	RCA	1	158
12	⑤	7	Luke Combs	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	1	450
RE-ENTRY	⑧	8	TWICE	JYP/IMPERIAL/REPUBLIC	1	64
11	10	9	Benson Boone	NIGHT STREET/WARNER	2	91
14	12	10	Kendrick Lamar	PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/INTERSCOPE CAPITOL	1	511
19	19	⑪	Billie Eilish	DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/INTERSCOPE CAPITOL	1	365
3	8	12	Cardi B	ATLANTIC/AG	1	226
25	21	13	Fleetwood Mac	WARNER/RHINO	3	341
⑬	9	14	Bad Bunny	RIMAS	1	369
16	14	15	Drake	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	588
22	11	16	Justin Bieber	JRC/ILH/DEF JAM/REPUBLIC	1	488
18	16	17	The Weeknd	XO/REPUBLIC	1	536
⑮	17	18	Olivia Dean	POLYDOR/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	15	6
23	18	19	Chappell Roan	KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	1	79
24	15	20	Lady Gaga	STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/INTERSCOPE CAPITOL	1	341

D'ANGELO: LIONEL FLUSIN/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY IMAGES; TWICE: JYP ENTERTAINMENT; WARREN: JACK D'RYCH.

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ARTISTS, BASED ON ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY, AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM THE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT. SEE CHARTS. LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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billboard

TOURING POWER PLAYERS



NO. 1

Wallen Gets ‘Better’ At No. 1

Morgan Wallen delivers his 19th Country Airplay No. 1 with “I Got Better.” The song gained by 13% to 32.7 million audience impressions Oct. 10-16, according to Luminate. The single, co-written by Wallen, is the fifth leader from his May album, *I’m the Problem*. One more chart-topper from the set and he will match the six from his 2023 full-length, *One Thing at a Time*, which remains tied for the one-album record — discounting deluxe editions — with Luke Bryan’s *Kill the Lights* from 2015.

“I Got Better” spends a second week at No. 1 on Hot Country Songs, with its airplay augmented by 12.7 million official U.S. streams and 1,000 sold. A week earlier, the track became Wallen’s 12th to lead the list and the fourth from *I’m the Problem*, equaling the output of *One Thing at a Time* for Wallen’s most from an album.

—RUSS PENUELL



NO. 1

‘Another’ Leader For Alabama Shakes

Alabama Shakes return to the top of the Triple A Airplay chart with “Another Life,” the first release from the Brittany Howard-led band since its 2015 album, *Sound & Color*. The act earns its second No. 1, after maiden entry “Hold On” led for one week in June 2012.

The group’s wait of 13 years, three months and three weeks between leaders is the second-longest in the chart’s nearly 30-year history, after Bruce Springsteen went 18 years and three months between “The Rising” in 2002 and “Letter to You” in 2020. During Alabama Shakes’ gap in No. 1 hits, Howard earned two solo lead-ers: “Stay High” in 2019 and “What Now” in 2023-24.

Alabama Shakes were on hiatus from 2018 to 2024, when the act reunited to play a show in Tuscaloosa, Ala. The group followed with tour dates that ran from July through September.

—KEVIN RUTHERFORD

Country Airplay				
LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	Artist	WKS. ON CHART
3	1	#1 for 1 WEEK GG I Got Better MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	Morgan Wallen	17
1	2	Heart Of Stone BAILEE & BUDDY/BMG/REPUBLIC/STONEY CREEK	Jelly Roll	29
4	3	Darlin' CHASE MATTHEW/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/WAR	Chase Matthew	46
5	4	Back In The Saddle SEVEN RIDGES/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE	Luke Combs	12
2	5	Bar None MCA NASHVILLE	Jordan Davis	30
7	6	Good News AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE/MAGNOLIA MUSIC	Shaboozey	38
8	7	Happen To Me TRIPLE TIGERS	Russell Dickerson	31
6	8	Bottle Rockets TRIPLE TIGERS	Scotty McCreery & Hootie & The Blowfish	23
10	9	Heavens To Betsy BIG MACHINE	Jackson Dean	56
12	10	Somewhere Over Laredo BROKEN BOW	Lainey Wilson	21

Triple A Airplay				
LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	Artist	WKS. ON CHART
4	1	#1 for 1 WEEK Another Life LIMESTONE LISTENING CLUB/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	Alabama Shakes	7
1	2	Sushi And Coca-Cola OASIS PIZZA/THIRTY TIGERS	St. Paul & The Broken Bones	12
2	3	Enough DBPM	Jeff Tweedy	12
6	4	Elegantly Wasted EASY EYE SOUND/CONCORD	Hermanos Gutierrez Featuring Leon Bridges	11
7	5	Ordinary Creature SKRIMSL EHF LAEKJARAS 1/SKARKALI/VIRGIN	Of Monsters And Men	9
5	6	mangetout DOMINO	Wet Leg	11
3	7	Mistakes BY AND BY/MOM+POP	CAAMP	14
8	8	Everybody Scream POLYDOR/REPUBLIC	Florence + The Machine	8
10	9	Lucy BLOOM FIELD/FUTURES/VIRGIN	Mt. Joy	10
11	10	Watch Me Go WHISPERING PINES/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	Lord Huron	10

COUNTRY AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY COUNTRY RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS, AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. TRIPLE A AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY ADULT ALTERNATIVE RADIO AIRPLAY DETECTIONS, AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. SEE CHARTS.LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

WALLEN: SPIKE SMITH; ALABAMA SHAKES: BOBBY RICH.

COUNTRY AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY COUNTRY RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS, AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. TRIPLE A AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY ADULT ALTERNATIVE RADIO AIRPLAY DETECTIONS, AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. SEE CHARTS.LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



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2025 TOURING POWER PLAYERS

Brown at Atlanta's Truist Park on Aug. 30.

SUMMER BREEZE

With his August win, Chris Brown becomes the second R&B artist to lead Top Tours

THROUGH THE FIRST SEVEN MONTHS of 2025, only three acts had ruled *Billboard*'s monthly Top Tours chart: Coldplay (January and April), Shakira (February and March) and Beyoncé (May, June and July). But a fourth name ultimately reached the top of the ranking before the end of the summer: Chris Brown. He grossed \$96.8 million and sold 590,000 tickets over 14 shows on his Breezy Bowl XX tour during August, according to figures reported to Billboard Boxscore — good for the month's highest-grossing and best-selling trek.

It's Brown's first time at No. 1, having previously risen as high as No. 8 last year while on his *11:11* tour. He's just the second R&B artist to rule the list since its 2019 inception, following seven wins by Beyoncé.

Brown's initial trip to the chart's peak is sparked by his move from arenas to baseball stadiums, tripling the sellable capacity for each of his shows. But his August gross is still a massive improvement upon his stadium performance from June on the European leg of this tour, when he played 11 dates and ranked at No. 12. Like most other R&B and hip-hop acts, Brown is a much bigger draw stateside than internationally — and the three-show bump from June to August enabled him to maximize his total reach to nearly 600,000 fans.

—ERIC FRANKENBERG

Top Tours			
	Artist	Gross	Total Attendance No. Of Shows
1	Chris Brown	\$96.8M	590K14
2	Coldplay	\$85.4M	521K8
3	The Weeknd	\$83.8M	533K12
4	Ed Sheeran	\$75M	583K12
5	Shakira	\$57.7M	490K12
6	My Chemical Romance	\$42.2M	207K5
7	Lady Gaga	\$40.7M	139K10
8	Dead & Company	\$38.3M	167K3
9	ENHYPEN	\$30.1M	189K11
10	Backstreet Boys	\$29.7M	200K12

Top Boxscores			
	Artist(s) VENUE DATE	Gross TICKET PRICES	Total Attendance NO. OF SHOWS Promoter(s)
1	Coldplay WEMBLEY STADIUM, LONDON AUG. 22-23, 26-27, 30-31	\$78.9M \$336/\$26.88	475K6 SJM Concerts
2	Outside Lands Music and Arts Festival GOLDEN GATE PARK, SAN FRANCISCO AUG. 8-10	\$41.4M \$549/\$209	209K3 Another Planet Entertainment
3	Dead & Company GOLDEN GATE PARK, SAN FRANCISCO AUG. 1-3	\$38.3M \$525/\$40	167K3 Another Planet Entertainment
4	Ed Sheeran ORESUNDSPARKEN, COPENHAGEN AUG. 28-31	\$25.6M \$171.17/\$85.58	179K4 FKP Scorpio Konzertproduktionen
5	Shakira ESTADIO GNP SEGUROS, MEXICO CITY AUG. 26-27, 29-30	\$24.1M \$429.90/\$62.75	216K4 Live Nation, OCESA
6	Electric Picnic Festival STRADBALLY HALL ESTATE, LADIS, IRELAND AUG. 29-31	\$18.2M \$315.59	57.8K3 MCD
7	Lady Gaga MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK AUG. 22-23, 26-27	\$18.1M \$376/\$61	54.4K4 Live Nation
8	Ed Sheeran STADION LETZIGGRUND, ZURICH AUG. 2-3	\$15.4M \$214.17/\$135.75	93.6K2 FKP Scorpio Konzertproduktionen
9	Chris Brown METLIFE STADIUM, EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. AUG. 12-13	\$15M \$349.50/\$39.50	107K2 Live Nation
10	Chris Brown TRUIST PARK, CUMBERLAND, GA. AUG. 30-31	\$14.8M \$299.50/\$39.50	79.2K2 Live Nation

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Top Venues

15,001 OR MORE CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Sphere LAS VEGAS	\$37.3M	247K	15
2	Madison Square Garden NEW YORK	\$28.5M	144K	12
3	Prudential Center NEWARK, N.J.	\$15.9M	118K	12
4	Climate Pledge Arena SEATTLE	\$15.3M	87.2K	6
5	O2 Arena LONDON	\$13.6M	75.4K	5
6	Kia Forum INGLEWOOD, CALIF.	\$13.5M	81.5K	7
7	United Center CHICAGO	\$11.8M	86.5K	6
8	Palacio de los Deportes MEXICO CITY	\$11.6M	143K	9
9	TD Garden BOSTON	\$11.6M	108K	8
10	Scotiabank Arena TORONTO	\$11.5M	101K	7



10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Forest Hills Stadium QUEENS	\$9.4M	85.1K	8
2	Hallenstadion ZURICH	\$7.3M	41K	3
3	CFG Bank Arena BALTIMORE	\$7.2M	67.1K	6
4	Moody Center AUSTIN	\$6.1M	56.7K	8
5	Movistar Arena BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA	\$3.9M	73.1K	7
6	Brisbane Entertainment Centre BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA	\$3.1M	25.9K	2
7	Dickies Arena FORT WORTH, TEXAS	\$2.7M	27.5K	3
8	Arena VFG GUADALAJARA, MEXICO	\$2.5M	35.4K	3
9	Desert Diamond Casino SAHUARITA, ARIZ.	\$2.5M	13.8K	2
10	Maverik Center WEST VALLEY CITY, UTAH	\$2.4M	23.6K	3

5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	Red Rocks Amphitheatre MORRISON, COLO.	\$23.2M	257K	33
2	Lake Tahoe Amphitheatre at Caesars Republic LAKE TAHOE, NEV.	\$5.6M	46.7K	8
3	Auditorio Nacional MEXICO CITY	\$5.3M	88.8K	11
4	Hearst Greek Theatre BERKELEY, CALIF.	\$4.5M	61.1K	9
5	Radio City Music Hall NEW YORK	\$4M	29.6K	6
6	Greek Theatre LOS ANGELES	\$3.9M	54.7K	12
7	MGM Music Hall at Fenway BOSTON	\$3.6M	50.3K	14
8	Custom House Square BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND	\$3.5M	57.1K	13
9	Auditorio Telmex GUADALAJARA, MEXICO	\$3.4M	36.1K	7
10	Mohegan Sun Arena UNCASVILLE, CONN.	\$3.3M	56.5K	10

2,501-5,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	OLG Stage at Fallsview Casino Resort NIAGARA FALLS, CANADA	\$4.5M	59.4K	13
2	Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier MONTREAL	\$4M	44.3K	16
3	Beacon Theatre NEW YORK	\$2.6M	27.4K	10
4	The Chelsea at The Cosmopolitan LAS VEGAS	\$1.9M	14.7K	8
5	Chicago Theatre CHICAGO	\$1.8M	21K	7
6	Lake Dillon Amphitheater DILLON, COLO.	\$1.7M	27.2K	9
7	KEMBA Live! COLUMBUS, OHIO	\$1.7M	29.8K	11
8	The Mission Ballroom DENVER	\$1.5M	32K	11
9	Santa Barbara Bowl SANTA BARBARA, CALIF.	\$1.5M	21.1K	6
10	Roadrunner BOSTON	\$1.3M	21K	8

2,500 OR LESS CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	DeVos Performance Hall GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.	\$3.8M	32.1K	16
2	The Mountain Winery SARATOGA, CALIF.	\$3.3M	29.6K	18
3	Ryman Auditorium NASHVILLE	\$2.4M	27.7K	16
4	Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater VAIL, COLO.	\$1M	14.7K	8
5	Channel 24 SACRAMENTO, CALIF.	\$912K	19.3K	11
6	The Bomb Factory DALLAS	\$878K	17.8K	8
7	The Eastern ATLANTA	\$784K	11.8K	7
8	Encore Theater at Wynn Las Vegas LAS VEGAS	\$505K	5.8K	5
9	The Novo by Microsoft LOS ANGELES	\$484K	8.6K	5
10	Rockwell at The Complex SALT LAKE CITY	\$417K	11.9K	7

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FENIX
ENTERTAINMENT



The Life Of A Showgirl Accounts For Over Half The U.S. Current Album Market In Its Debut Week

Additionally, during that time frame, 71% of all albums sold in the United States were Taylor Swift's new project

BY DAN RYS AND ED CHRISTMAN // ILLUSTRATION BY MICHELLE ROHN

TAYLOR SWIFT'S *The Life of a Showgirl* landed with unprecedented impact in its first week, debuting at No. 1 atop the Billboard 200 and shattering first-week records for album sales and equivalent album units — the only album in history to cross the 4 million threshold.

And that's not its only milestone.

For the week ending Oct. 9, the U.S. recorded-music industry registered 21.8 million combined current and catalog-equivalent album units, and Swift's new release alone accounted for 18.3% of that total, according to Luminate. But among current albums (those released within the past 18 months), the industry racked up 8 million equivalent album units, meaning *The Life of a Showgirl*

Spotify is partnering with Universal, Sony, Warner, Merlin and Believe on "artist-first" artificial intelligence music tools.

Lyric and music data company MusixMatch signed AI-based licensing deals with the three major music publishers.

comprised 50% of the entire current market and nearly doubled the total current market — 4.4 million — of the week prior to its release. (For comparison's sake, the 2.6 million units that Swift's *The Tortured Poets Department* captured upon arrival represented 37.8% of the current market the week of its release in April 2024.)

In fact, *Showgirl*'s 4 million equivalent album units surpassed the current market total for six of the past 41 weeks of 2025 so far. When her catalog is factored in, the total rises to 4.2 million for the week of Oct. 9. And in just one week, the album accounted for 2.3% of the industry's current equivalent album units for 2025 so far and streamed 522,600 equivalent album units, equating to 680.9 million on-demand official streams of *Showgirl*. That is the largest streaming week of the year, and the fourth-largest of all time.

Swift's domination becomes clearer when examined by format. *Showgirl* was made available across 38 versions: 11 digital download editions, eight vinyl variants, 16 CD versions, two boxed sets and one cassette. The title accounted for 71% of all the albums sold in the United States that week, 77% of all CDs, 66%

Finance platform **beatBread** is launching a \$100 million fund to support independent labels and distributors.

Iconic Artists Group acquired a portion of the **Frank Sinatra** estate.

of all vinyl, 58% of all digital albums and 72% of all physical albums. In vinyl units — 1.3 million — it had the largest sales week in the modern era, besting *The Tortured Poets Department* and becoming the only album to cross the million-seller threshold in a single week.

Sources say that during *Showgirl*'s debut week, as sales and consumption units mounted, Republic and Swift's team focused on breaking the 4 million album consumption record. Once it became clear that target was within reach, those teams deployed every tool imaginable, including sale pricing on Swift's web store, as well as favorable pricing with other merchants and streaming services. They surpassed the 4 million mark by a little over 2,000 units.

How do those statistics translate to dollars? Using Luminate data, *Billboard* estimates that *Showgirl* rang up at least \$51 million that week in the United States alone. That total could be as much as 30% higher, given that some of those dozens of variants were limited editions, some were box sets and others involved bonus materials or merchandise, all of which would likely be priced higher for retailers. Another uplifting factor: The bulk of the 3.1 million physical copies of *Showgirl* that Luminate reported as sold — about 2.8 million copies or, *Billboard* estimates, 89% of the physical-unit sales volume — were bought through Swift's web store at retail prices, which would bump the \$51 million figure to \$70 million from U.S. sales and streaming activity. Her merch sales, which she does not disclose, almost certainly added millions to that total.

It's worth noting that album sales were also boosted by what one veteran label executive called a "very old-school" tactic. Swift did not release individual track downloads from *Showgirl*, meaning fans could only buy the full album on iTunes or Amazon's web stores. This made it the first to debut at No. 1 on the *Billboard* 200 without selling any track-equivalent albums since *Billboard* revised the chart's methodology to include the equivalent-album-unit format in December 2014.

In the 1990s, the major labels used this strategy to spur album sales. In the 2010s, Garth Brooks, Kid Rock and AC/DC employed it to protect the album format because digital sales were shifting to a singles-dominated economy. "That was a Garth Brooks move," another industry veteran says. "He wanted his fans to experience his albums as a whole." Sources tell *Billboard* that Republic Records executives are saying Swift decided to not sell *Showgirl* song downloads for similar creative reasons. **B**

2.8M

Physical copies of *The Life of a Showgirl* sold through Swift's website — 89% of the 3.1 million sold in total.

Source: *Billboard* estimate based on Luminate data.



MUSIC MARKETING 'MONEYBALL'

Luminate analyzed five years of survey data to pinpoint artists ideal for marketing snack foods, personal care products, credit cards and other brands to their fans and the public

BY ELIZABETH DILTS MARSHALL

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FROM TOUR SPONSORSHIPS

to Taco Bell commercials featuring Turnstile, major companies see billion-dollar branding opportunities in partnering with artists, and a new study from Luminate has some matchmaking suggestions.

The industry-leading music analytics platform examined five years' worth of survey results and metrics measuring likability, awareness and brand endorsement to determine the best artists to market sodas, snack foods, cosmetics and credit cards. "Cultural capital isn't something brands should tap into retroactively," the report's authors write. "Behavioral audience entertainment data can inform marketers, helping them to locate artists whose fan base matches a brand's target audience. Think of it as 'moneyball' for brand partnerships."

Luminate has collected quarterly online survey results from a representative slice of U.S. consumers, ages 13 and up, since 2021. It identified super-purchasers of food and beverages, personal care and hygiene, travel, telecom, mobile apps, and banking and finance products and analyzed the survey results and other metrics to understand their attitudes and perceptions toward some 600 artists and 100 music genres and subgenres.

The study deliberately excluded megastars like Taylor Swift and instead identified artists who overindexed with super-purchasers on likability and brand awareness.

The artists who scored among the highest in each consumer category were country crossover star Bailey Zimmerman for food and beverage products; the queen of regional Mexican music, Ana Bárbara, for personal care and hygiene products; rising country star Lainey Wilson for banking and finance; Bebe Rexha for telecom; electronic artist Kenya Grace for travel; and Jamaican singer-rapper Shenseea for service and e-commerce apps such as ride-hailing and food delivery.

The following are some further highlights from the report.

BAILEY ZIMMERMAN

The study plotted the "Fall in Love" singer's likability and brand endorsement scores from survey respondents who recently bought at least three packaged snacks, coffee or other food products. Zimmerman outscored Jennie, Leon Thomas, Dolly Parton and Queen as a good bet for marketers. While Chris Stapleton had the highest awareness score, Zimmerman won on likability. His fans tend to be younger and more affluent than the overall population and are more likely to listen to music at least twice a week on Apple Music and Spotify.

"Zimmerman presents a narrower but deeper fandom among category buyers," the report's authors found, while "Stapleton offers a broader though still highly efficient fandom."

ANA BÁRBARA

Longtime grupero singer-songwriter Ana Bárbara beat Young Miko, Ayra Starr and Parton when it came to her strength as a personal care product brand endorser, with only Parton beating her on likability. Ana Bárbara scored particularly well in awareness, perhaps due to the current popularity of regional Mexican music. She overindexed with millennial, Gen X and even Gen Z consumers, and fan devotion is particularly strong. Those audiences are more likely than most to use social media apps including TikTok and Instagram.

LAINÉY WILSON

Wilson falls in the middle of a pack of superstars that includes Stevie Nicks and Kelly Clarkson, who both ranked slightly ahead of Wilson on awareness. However, Clarkson ranked high on awareness and public perception but in the average range for fan engagement metrics. Wilson ranked among the highest for likability and purchase likelihood.

The report also found that Wilson's fans tend to have higher-than-average income, with 38% earning more than \$75,000 a year, compared with the general population. And more than three-quarters of the banking and financial product consumers surveyed said they would be more likely to buy a product that she endorsed. **B**

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Thank you for highlighting **Fort Worth** on the worldwide stage!



Ticketmaster named **Saumil Mehta** global president.

Warner Music Group merged its recorded-music businesses in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg with those in Germany, Switzerland and Austria to form an expanded **Warner Music Central Europe**.

WHY ARE SO MANY HUMANS DOWNLOADING AI SONGS?

Several tracks assisted by artificial intelligence have landed on *Billboard*'s charts

BY STEVE KNOPPER

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N *BILLBOARD*'S ROCK Digital Song Sales chart for the week of Oct. 18, a curious track sat at No. 11, just below Yungblud's "Zombie" and AC/DC's "Thunderstruck." "You Got This," which peaked at No. 10 the previous week, is built on a chanting "Don't quit like this/Hold your ground" chorus and Nickelback-style vocals. The song sold 1,000 downloads and generated 294,000 streams (according to Luminate), 96,000 TikTok likes and nearly 3,700 comments on that platform, including from a man about to undergo cancer surgery and a widow looking for a sign from her late husband. " 'You Got This' was the phrase he ALWAYS said," she posted.

The song is credited to Unbound Music, which has posted more than 120 tracks on TikTok over the past year with the disclaimer, "All songs have [artificial intelligence] elements in them." (A direct message sent to Unbound Music's TikTok account went unanswered.)

"You Got This" is not the only AI-assisted song to chart. Xania Monet, an AI artist whose lyrics come from a Mississippi-based songwriter, made headlines after cracking the top 10 on R&B Digital Song Sales for two straight weeks in September and reaching No. 22 on the overall Digital Song Sales chart. Enlly Blue's "Through My Soul" was at No. 15 on the Oct. 18 Rock Digital Song Sales list, with 1,000 downloads and 224,000 streams. And ChildPets Galore's "The Only Thing I Can Take to Heaven" peaked at No. 14 on Christian Digital Song Sales in mid-August and has so far racked up 305,000 Spotify streams and nearly



"People can use existing AI-generated tracks to train AI to do a better job. You can use that downloaded track to make something grander, even bigger."

—AHMED KORDOFANI, PRODUCER

600,000 YouTube views since July.

"AI [is] booming these days, and a lot of people have been using it to enhance or generate new songs," says Ahmed Kordofani — who goes by Chord of Annie — a London producer who "humanizes" AI tracks.

What is surprising — and harder to understand — is why these artists are selling so many tracks online in addition to all the streaming.

There may be a simple explanation: Creators find digital download files to be cleaner source material for training generative AI systems than recordings based on Spotify or Apple Music streams. And AI creators look for successful AI tracks so they can follow similar blueprints.

"What's driving the sales is the experimenting and curiosity behind it," Kordofani says. "People can use existing AI-generated tracks to train AI to do a better job. You can use that downloaded track to make something grander, even bigger."

In addition to the chart activity, *Billboard*'s

charts team has identified several apparently AI-enhanced tracks that have sold an unexpected number of downloads, suggesting real people, not just online bots designed to boost streaming data, are fans of the music. That may be due in part to lingering iTunes habits from Christian and country consumers. About 5% of overall music fans reported purchasing a download from Apple or Amazon in 2024, according to a MusicWatch survey, compared with 9% of country fans. And 23% of Christian music listeners reported listening to digital files, compared with 18% of listeners overall.

"Country fans are much more likely to be still buying downloads. The Christian genre is smaller, but they're still more likely to be listening to things from iTunes or Amazon," MusicWatch managing partner Russ Crupnick says. "One could make the argument [that] if there's a lot of AI falling into those genres, and they're available on downloads, and those [listeners] are more likely to fall into downloads as well as streaming — you can tie all those bows together." **B**

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MAY 30
MIAMI, FL

JUNE 1
ORLANDO, FL

JUNE 7
NEW YORK, NY

JUNE 9
CHICAGO, IL

JUNE 13
INGLEWOOD, CA

JUNE 14
ORLANDO, FL

JUNE 20
IRVING, TX

JUNE 21
HOUSTON, TX

SEPT 25
MONTERREY, MX

OCT 28
SANTIAGO, CH

OCT 31
LIMA, PERU

NOV 11
LAS VEGAS, NV

NOV 14
HIGHLAND, CA

NOV 15
PHOENIX, AZ

NOV 16
EL PASO, TX

NOV 20
SAN ANTONIO, TX

NOV 21
AUSTIN, TX

NOV 22
MCALLEN, TX

NOV 23
MCALLEN, TX

SECOND DATE

NOV 28
BOGOTA, COL

DEC 5
SAN DIEGO, CA

DEC 6
FRESNO, CA

DEC 7
SAN JOSÉ, CA

DEC 12
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

DEC 14
DENVER, CO

JAN 25
MADRID, ESPAÑA

JAN 26
MADRID, ESPAÑA

SECOND DATE

JAN 31
MEXICO, DF

FEB 11
BUENOS AIRES, ARG

MAR 13
TEGUCIGALPA, HO

MAR 14
BELEN, COSTA RICA

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Sean “Diddy” Combs was sentenced to more than four years in prison for violating federal prostitution laws.

A judge dismissed **Drake’s** lawsuit against **Universal Music Group** over **Kendrick Lamar’s** “Not Like Us.”

From The Desks Of...

MIKE WEISS AND DAVID MELHADO

CO-HEADS OF MUSIC, UNITEDMASTERS

BY DAN RYS

MIKE WEISS AND David Melhado like to tell the story of when they first met. It was 2019, and UnitedMasters artist NLE Choppa had just released “Shotta Flow,” which would eventually become a top 40 hit on the Billboard Hot 100, and Weiss, UM’s head of A&R, was interviewing Melhado for the company’s head of artist marketing position.

For the meeting, Melhado “had put together a web chart that had ‘artist’s vision’ at the center, and then A&R, PR, marketing, digital and brands that started from the basis of understanding who the artist is, what their objectives are, what their core audience is and then [how] everything has to tie back to that,” Weiss recalls in a listening room at UM’s Brooklyn offices. “That was my playbook, and I had not seen anybody else draw it in the exact same way.”

Weiss, 34, and Melhado, 41, come from different backgrounds: Weiss is a third-generation music business executive, after his father, Barry, and his grandfather, Hy. Melhado got his start working for Jermaine Dupri’s dad, Michael Mauldin, building out the mid-2000s Scream Tour with artists like Bow Wow and Omarion. But they share a professional background in artist management — Weiss with Noah Cyrus and Labrinth; Melhado with Verse Simmonds and producer Sak Pase — that gave

them a 360 worldview when it comes to artists’ careers, one that emphasizes building a brand and a catalog over chasing hits. (Steve Stoute, who founded UM in 2017, also comes from artist management, having guided Nas’ career in the 1990s.)

“We build brick by brick,” Melhado says of his and Weiss’ work on artist development and a label business strategy that encompasses DIY distribution and a premium-services tier.

That approach has become the blueprint for the modern record company and is paying off for UM’s artists and for the two executives, who were promoted to co-heads of music for the company in October.

Texas rapper BigXthaPlug’s foray into the country genre was a massive success this year, yielding a top five Hot 100 hit, “All the Way” featuring Bailey Zimmerman, and a top 10 Billboard 200 album. FloyyMenor’s “Gata Only” featuring Cris MJ won a Billboard Music Award for top Latin song of the year in 2024. And partnerships with African super-producer Sarz and indie R&B singer-songwriter Brent Faiyaz have expanded UM’s horizons.

In their new roles, Weiss and Melhado are leading the charge for all of it. “It’s our job to always be changing and evolving,” Weiss says. “If the broader industry is doing what we set out to do, then that’s just validation that we’re on the right path.”



Melhado (left) and Weiss

DOWAN WILSON

What was Steve Stoute doing at UnitedMasters that drew you to the company?

DAVID MELHADO He was bridging the gap between the brand world [and music]. When we came here, it was very much a startup and the idea of being able to support artists at scale was attractive, but we knew it was going to be a challenge. He's given us the space to fail fast and then pivot.

MIKE WEISS I was looking to go somewhere where I could really help shape a business. At that time, a number of key executives were rolling out of the major systems and starting their own businesses that were having early success. Making that bet on Steve was a no-brainer. But I also found the tech side of things — building a future of independence — really interesting as well.

Why did you want to build a label on top of the distribution business?

MELHADO We were doing these premium distribution deals, but labels were cherry-picking all our acts — Lil Tecca, NLE Choppa, J.I. the Prince [of N.Y.] — because we didn't have long-term rights or a team that could support them. So that was the part of the argument to Steve: We have to change the way that we do our deals, and you've got to give us the ability to build the team.

WEISS We got to a point where we were saying, "We can identify and be successful with talent, but what's going to differentiate us from the majors if we don't have the staff to really support them and take it to the next level?" A lot of companies in those early days of distribution came across that same problem: What's the value of finding an amazing artist that's going to develop into a superstar if you can't be there when they're a superstar? We said, "Let's build a label business that can be competitive with the majors in terms of resources but with the artist-friendly deals of the distros."

How did you build the label differently from a traditional major?

WEISS We said, "What does

development look like in the 2020s?" It's similar in many ways to building a startup. You want to start raw and authentic. You want to pivot quickly. You want to see what people are reacting to. You want to fail fast. So we needed to put a team together that was wholly committed toward building something from the ground up. And with that came the focus of constant progress and making sure that whatever steps were taken were not in the pursuit of a hit record but of building an artist that has a foundation, a fan base, an audience that everything else can live within.

Artists also need global reach. How do you approach that?

WEISS The majors have companies in every territory. Over the past two years, we've seen that shift from a positive to a negative [for them] and a negative to a positive for us in that we have the ability to bring on whichever partner we want in whatever region. The team we would use in Germany for an Ekkstacy record would not be the same team that we should use for BigXthaPlug or FloyyMenor. That approach has allowed us to have flexibility and to choose the right partners.

with Bailey [Zimmerman], and people just went crazy. So the team went down to Nashville and met with every writer and producer.

How does sharing an office with Stoute's branding company, Translation, give you an advantage?

MELHADO Working with brands has been embedded in the DNA of UnitedMasters from the beginning. That has been a big part of BigX's story. One of the early brand deals that he got was creating the theme song for the XFL. I think it's safe to say that we're the only creative solutions company and cre-

"Success is when you see an artist who's continuing to grow week over week, month over month, year over year. And the best way to do that is by building catalog rather than having peaks and spikes that don't really stand the test of time in the digital era."

—WEISS

How did you apply that development strategy to BigXthaPlug?

MELHADO When we first partnered with BigX in October 2021, he had 500 monthly listeners on Spotify. We took a really regional approach, working records in the clubs and trying to create an early groundswell, and did that same thing from a digital vantage point as well. We would release singles and then package them as an EP. Release more singles, then package it as an album. And we kept replicating that same process.

WEISS For us, first-week sales are not barometers for anything. We're focused on building an artist holistically.

Nashville's music culture is different from on the coasts. How did you navigate that world for the BigXthaPlug album?

WEISS When we put out the "Texas" record, which is a country/hip-hop record, we started hearing that Luke Combs and Morgan Wallen and Post Malone were fans. When BigX was still relatively unknown, the country community welcomed him with open arms. Dave and I went and sat with [producer-songwriter] Charlie Handsome and talked about doing a country collaboration EP, and he was down to give it a try. Then BigX posted an Instagram clip of "All the Way"

ative agency that has a full-blown music company and record label. That's an important ingredient in the artist development story for us.

What does success look like for you guys?

WEISS Success is when you see an artist who's continuing to grow week over week, month over month, year over year. And the best way to do that is by building catalog rather than having peaks and spikes that don't really stand the test of time in the digital era. Everyone talks nowadays about how catalog is the thing that is keeping the majors afloat. We don't have a catalog to rely on, and our goal is to build that. ■

“Vaamos!!

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From promoting the headliners of tomorrow to guiding touring veterans, these executives – including Live Nation promotion legend **Arthur Fogel**, visionary Vans Warped Tour founder **Kevin Lyman** and other leaders from the agency, venue and ticketing spaces – propelled the live sector to another stellar year

RAUW'S WORLD

Reggaetón star **Rauw Alejandro** transported audiences to salsa's golden age on his *Cosa Nuestra* tour — a high-concept smash that cemented his status as one of the global arena circuit's most exciting new headliners

BY JESSICA ROIZ

Rauw onstage at San Diego's Viejas Arena on April 30.



**IN A LATE-SPRING**

night, Downtown Miami was a place out of time. Thousands of people gathered dressed to the nines, the women rocking

sequined gowns and kitten heels, the men wearing tailored suits and polished dress shoes. Their attire fused Puerto Rican culture and Mafia fantasy and seemed beamed in from decades ago — but the crowd entering Miami's Kaseya Center on this warm evening wasn't there for an act of yesteryear, but rather one of the hottest arena artists on the planet.

"It was a whole vibe," Rauw Alejandro says over Zoom months later, now off the road and back home in Puerto Rico. "It felt like we went back to the past and you can feel that energy. It's not mandatory, but if you dress up, you'll have more fun because you're immersed in the story. You're literally traveling to that time and age."

typical reggaetón concert. The Broadway-inspired, four-act show featured sophisticated costumes, a six-piece live band and eight dancer-actors, all part of a storyline driven by Rauw's biggest hits.

The show follows Rauw's Don Raúl as the young immigrant tries to make it in the big city — and along the way falls in love, experiences betrayal and even gets arrested. "What makes my tour unique is the smoothness of the storytelling and how it connects with my songs from the beginning to the end," Rauw says. "I think I'm setting the bar very high."

The ambitious concept has yielded returns that would please Don Raúl. Across spring and summer legs in North America and Europe, respectively, the Live Nation-produced tour grossed \$91.7 million and sold 562,000 tickets, according to Billboard Boxscore, making Rauw's fifth tour the most lucrative of his career. He just returned to the road for dates in South America and Mexico and will wrap the tour with a five-date residency at San Juan's Coliseo de Puerto Rico

"Cosa Nuestra is not a stadium show. It's a Broadway show in an arena. I would even say it's the biggest Broadway show."

—RAUW ALEJANDRO

Like many arena and stadium stars today, the 32-year-old reggaetón star encouraged audiences to follow a special dress code for his show. His *Cosa Nuestra* tour this year channeled the elegance and glamour of a certain 1970s New York, along with the Cosa Nostra that ruled it. For the shows, he constructed an alter ego: Don Raúl, a suave Nuyorican hipster living in the Big Apple.

"I lived in New Jersey at an uncle's house after Hurricane Maria [in 2017]," says the artist born Raúl Alejandro Ocasio Ruiz, who considers New York his second home and whose father was born in Brooklyn. "I went there to work for a year and took the train to the city to continue to do my music. I'm in Puerto Rico most of the time, but for work, my base is New York. So I moved back there three years ago when I was looking for inspiration for this new chapter. I was immersed in the culture... all the Broadway shows, jazz clubs, speakeasies, and I worked with that aesthetic for my new project."

With *Cosa Nuestra*, Rauw created a world for his fans to soak themselves in — one far from a

José Miguel Agrelot — his second multirate run at the venue this year — in November.

With its achievements, the trek, in support of Rauw's fifth studio album, 2024's *Cosa Nuestra*, has mirrored his chart success. The album and tour take their name and inspiration from another *Cosa Nuestra*, the genre-defining 1969 salsa album by Willie Colón and Héctor Lavoe, two influential salsa figures who revolutionized the golden era of big-band artistry and popularized the genre in the '60s and '70s with the culture-shifting Fania label. For the set, Rauw fused his signature *perreo*, electro-funk and R&B with *bomba*, salsa and bachata for a sound entirely his own.

Audiences responded: Upon its November release, *Cosa Nuestra* debuted at No. 1 on Top Latin Albums and Latin Rhythm Albums and at No. 6 on the Billboard 200, marking his highest-charting set, and first top 10, among five career entries. In late September, Rauw unleashed another album, the "prequel" *Cosa Nuestra: Capítulo 0*, which debuted at No. 3 on both Top Latin Albums and Latin Rhythm Albums.

"The meaning of *Cosa Nuestra* is so big that I have to release 20 albums to explain its concept. There's no time to do that in just one album," Rauw says with a laugh. "I'm going to continue to bring my roots to the world. Nowadays, I feel so connected with my people and am very proud of where I come from. I don't have to look outside when I have everything here." This is how Rauw's globe-trotting tour came together.

'I WANT TO WORK WITH THE BEST TEAMS IN THE INDUSTRY'

Rauw's 2023 Saturno tour grossed \$50.2 million but had its entire Latin American leg canceled due to technical and logistical problems. Duars Entertainment, the company led by Rauw's then-manager, Eric Duars, produced the tour through its Duars Live division, and afterward, Rauw and Duars parted ways. Rauw's new team, led by the trifecta of co-manager Jorge "Pepo" Ferradas (who has managed Latin stars including Shakira) and longtime Rauw associates Matías Solaris and José "Che" Juan Torres, is now helping him streamline his operation.

RAUW ALEJANDRO For me, it was very frustrating not completing the *Saturno* tour. I'm not going to lie: There were months that I would cry in my shower, in my bed, fucking frustrated because I put so much effort in what I do. I took my time. I trained a lot. There were many things that were out of my control. My old team was a mess and disorganized. I consider myself one of the best artists right now, so I want to work with the best teams in the industry.

JORGE "PEPO" FERRADAS, co-manager I received a call from one of Rauw's lawyers and [his] business adviser, "Che" Juan, and he told me that Rauw was creating a company where he would, in a sense, be the director. I met Matías [Solaris], Rauw's personal manager, and we created this trilogy management format. We are three different people who have been able to tackle all areas of the business, slightly breaking the norm of having a single manager.

RAUW After having the same management for seven, eight years, for me, it was a huge change in dynamic in my work and it was challenging. I was kind of scared because there were things I didn't know how to do. But now, it feels nice to have a team who believes in you and in your project. They're not afraid to lose anything; they just want an artist that can create and bring new things to the table.

FERRADAS Rauw was determined to grow in every area. He knew he was facing the challenge of making perhaps the most important album of his career to date, and we understood that to present it live, we had to put on the best possible production that would reflect the artist's growth. We had to find strategic partners, in this case Live Nation and UTA [where Rauw signed in 2024], who knew how to think, dream and execute on a grand scale.

RAUW You either get stuck or you evolve. Now I'm doing the music that I want with the people that I want and I feel really happy. This has been the best year of my career.

Backstage at Kaseya Center
in Miami on May 30.





Backstage at Seattle's
Climate Pledge Arena
on the opening night
of the *Cosa Nuestra*
world tour on April 5.

'HE WANTED THEM TO BE CLASSY WITH SUITS AND TIES'

When Rauw headlined New York's Governors Ball festival in 2024, he introduced his new alter ego by wearing a pinstripe suit reminiscent of a '70s Nuyorican hipster. But Don Raúl had been in the works well before that — and Rauw would have to wait a little longer to bring him to the masses.

FERRADAS Planning and timing are key to making things happen. Often, the public doesn't see or isn't aware of how much time a project like this takes.

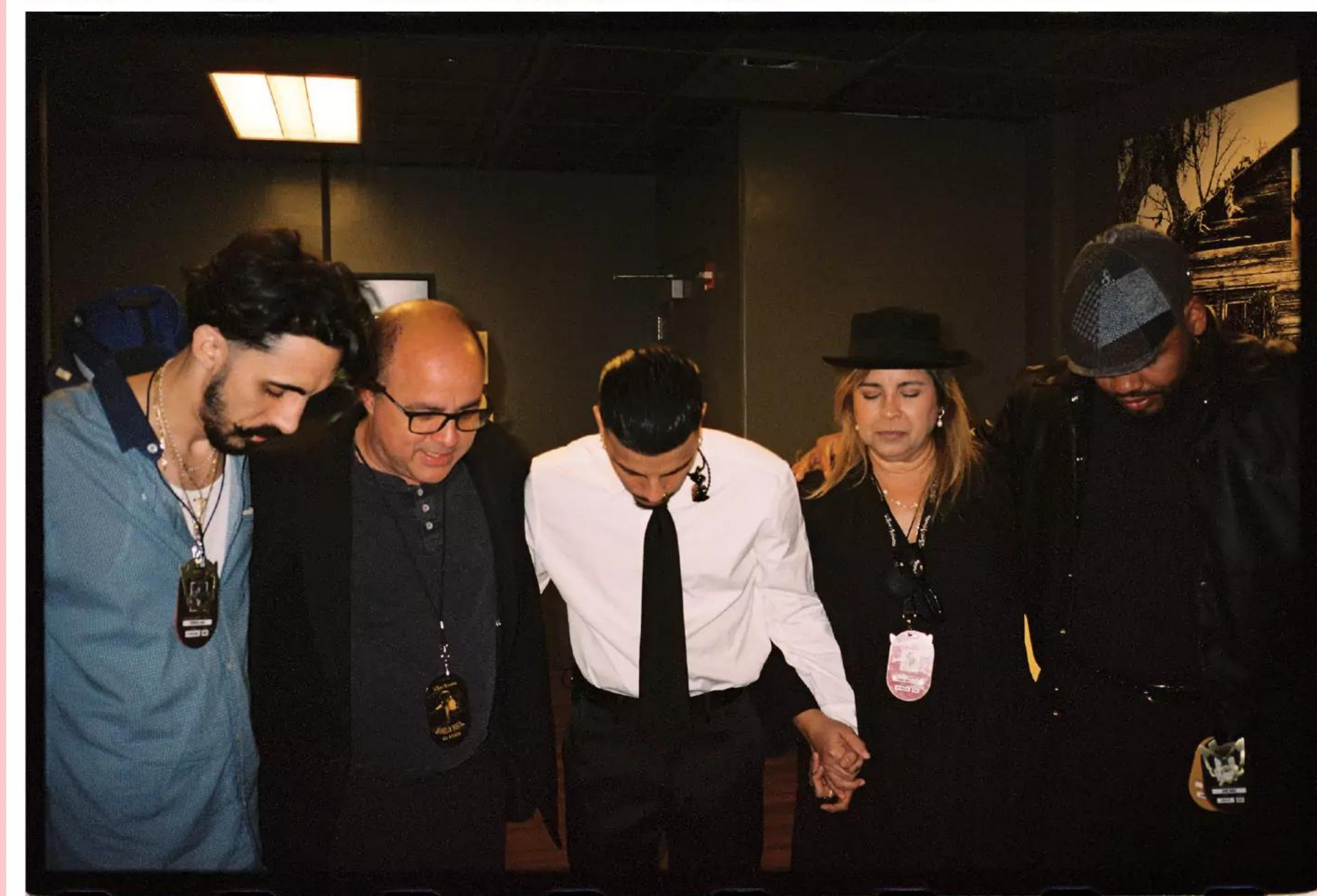
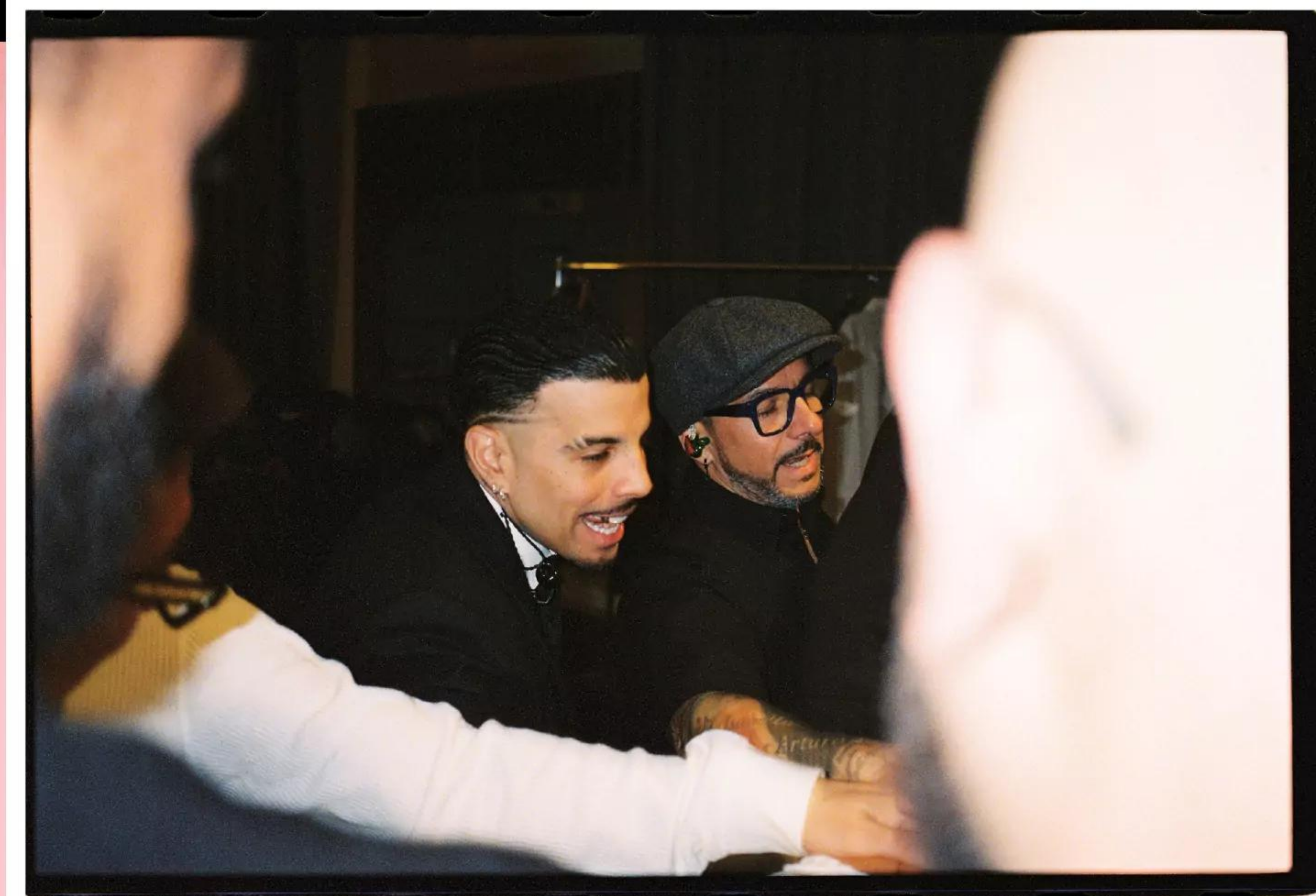
FELIX "FEFE" BURGOS, choreographer Rauw and I always have conversations, and when he first proposed this entire [*Cosa Nuestra*] concept to me, I thought, "Oh, damn!" He'll be working on an album, and we'll start talking about the next one. As we're working on one tour, we're already working on another one. We knew from a long, long, long time ago that he was going to release an album that was going to be very band-incorporated. When he was doing [2022 album] *Saturno*, he was already talking about *Cosa Nuestra*.

ADRIAN MARTINEZ, creator and show director/co-founder of creative agency **STURDY** A year before the [*Cosa Nuestra*] tour started, Q1 of 2024, I went to New York to meet with Rauw and start talking about what *Cosa Nuestra* was going to be. He played me [lead single] "Touching the Sky" for the first time and told me that was going to be the vibe. We walked around the city that same night for about two hours, went to different parts, took photos of buildings and talked about architecture. We went to eat, went to a bar and talked about what we wanted to do. These were all super-early ideas, but we had a year to develop [them]. It gave us an ample amount of time to really home in on the details.

RAUW It was difficult to create this tour. I like to wait for people to listen to the album and see how they respond before I create the show rundown — which songs am I going to take out of my old catalog? Which are the new songs I'm going to add? It's a whole lot of thinking to make it smooth and nice, and that takes time. It all started after my performance at Gov Ball in June.

JOSÉ "SAPO" GONZÁLEZ, musical director Right before *Saturno* came out, Rauw was already saying he eventually was going to need a full band but that he wanted them to be classy with suits and ties. This all became reality for his performance on the *Today* show in [2024] and he never looked back.

FERRADAS Last year, the strategy was to do festivals and TV specials, always knowing that the tour would be scheduled for 2025. He [played] several [festivals], including *Sueños* in Chicago, Global Citizen in New York and [played] the MTV Video



Backstage in Miami with (top) stage manager Orlando and (bottom, from left) friend Francis Diaz, his uncle Rodney, mother Maria Nelly and assistant Jose Rosa.

Music Awards for the first time.

MIKE G, partner/agent, **UTA** His team invited us to a one-week camp to share ideas and strategies, so they really let us form part of his overall business, which I think gave us an advantage as agents. The more we know about a project, we can plan a lot better.

RAUW As an artist, what helps me a lot is to plan my work two to three years ahead. I don't like to repeat myself in projects. I like to do different music, and having a map and being organized helps me go through it. I get a lot of inspiration and I'm always taking notes. Yes, I'm in this chapter right now, but I'm already planning my next one. I think that helps me [remain] innovative and versatile in this industry.

'IT'S A BROADWAY SHOW IN AN ARENA'

Rauw knew he wanted a special live treatment for the world he had created on *Cosa Nuestra*. But translating the album to the stage — and with the elaborate, Broadway-caliber production he wanted — was tough.

MARTINEZ We knew it was going to be all New York. It was inevitable. Immediately, we thought of the things that were important to New York and how these stories were told. Personally, I thought of *West Side Story*. How do we take inspiration from that to give an ode to what's come before? Rauw and I even went to see *The Great Gatsby*



At Toyota Center in Houston on May 6.

together [on Broadway]. Then we sat together for two straight days to write the script and [develop] what the narrative was going to be. We had a blank page up on his TV, and we went through all the acts.

MIKE G His tour is a movie, very cinematic. I think he set the bar very high. It's about cultural ownership, authenticity, about pride. The production feels very personal. You follow the storyline, you get invested in it, and that's hard to do during a concert. He's telling a story while playing some of his best records.

RAUW *Cosa Nuestra* is not a stadium show. It's a Broadway show in an arena. I would even say it's the biggest Broadway show. In a stadium, you [wouldn't] be able to see all the details because it's too big. We planned this show for arenas.

BURGOS The part I felt was challenging was, "How do we make a concert into a Broadway play?" Because at the end of the day, this isn't a Broadway play. This is a concert, but you want it to feel like a show.

MARTINEZ There were so many props, production elements that all had to work together so closely. We were down to milliseconds on transitions. The *Saturno* [tour] was also time-coded but [had] less going on and more just [relied] on him singing, dancing and interacting with the crowd. There weren't really any theatrics [on that tour] compared to what we did in *Cosa Nuestra*.

BURGOS Everything in that show is choreographed. We needed the cues to be perfect

because there was very little room for freedom in certain aspects. When we did the choreography for [the tours supporting 2020's] *Afrodisiaco* and [2021's] *Vice Versa*, yeah, you can floor-hump because that was the vibe, but for *Cosa Nuestra*, he wanted it to be classy. We wanted the choreography to be sensual but not vulgar.

RAUW Throughout my entire career, I've been focusing on being one of the best performers in the world, and I focused a lot on dancing, but having a live band was my dream. It allowed me to explore different sounds while feeling more classic, more clean, more elegant.

GONZÁLEZ The band unifies all of his catalog into this new universe. The best example is what we did with [*Saturno*'s] "No Me Sueltes," which now passes through a bunch of musical genres and fits right into *Cosa Nuestra*. The band also adds versatility and energy and a vibe. It's not a background band — everything is about enhancing Rauw and making that connection with the fans stronger.

MARTINEZ We were all feeling like we were taking a huge risk. This was never done in the genre. How were people going to react to the pace? When you break down the show, it's so different from your typical concert. We said, "As long as we're all on the same page about this, it could be great, or not" — but we believed in it.

SEAN COUTT, merchandise creative director/
founder of fashion label *Pas Une Marque*
Cosa Nuestra is almost a personal story of

Rauw and his upbringing in New York, so creatively, [the merchandise] had to tie in. Rauw approved every single design himself. That really shows that he's very dedicated to his fans and that he cares about what we're putting out. He really wants that to be an opportunity for fans to see that he's not only creatively onstage but also 360.

RAUW I make the final decisions on everything related to the tour: the music, the stage, the band, the dancers, the lighting, the props. I'm very involved with all the teams. I have a huge team who are the best, but I'm very picky and need to see everyone's work.

FERRADAS Rauw represents this generation of artists who are superinformed, involved and very clear about what they want. He always fought to achieve what he wanted, and he corrected us every step of the way so things would come out as he envisioned it. It came naturally. He's very involved in the artistic side of things.

'HE'S A CULTURAL ICON'

With a new team in tow that's helping him reach an even larger global audience, Rauw is gearing up for his next career move — and a much-needed vacation.

FERRADAS We knew we wanted to start in the United States; it was key to be able to showcase the show there and hold 30 concerts, including [four dates in] Puerto Rico. We knew we had to go to Europe in the summer and con-



At The O2 in London on June 17.

“When you talk about global benchmarks, Rauw’s position competes on the same level as top global pop acts, not just within Latin music.”

—HANS SCHAFER, LIVE NATION

tinue in Latin America, where the most loyal fans are, and then come back and finish in Puerto Rico.

MIKE G In London he played at the O2 Arena for the first time, and Germany is always a unique market, but he did extremely well. We were never worried about any market. We were very confident, even about the ones he had never visited before. I know there’s going to be growth and opportunity moving forward in Asia. He held a festival there last year, so I think that’s going to be

another great market for him.

RAUW I would love to conquer Asia with my music; it’s one of my goals. I’ve been to Japan many times and performed there for the first time last year. It’s totally different performing for them. Japanese people are really organized. It’s not like us Latinos that are loud and crazy. Setting a new goal is what always keeps me going and gives me energy to continue working and craft my art.

HANS SCHAFER, senior vp of global touring, Live Nation

When you talk about global benchmarks, Rauw’s position competes on the same level as top global pop acts, not just within Latin music. When we talk about his place in the industry and what this tour has accomplished, it’s as high up with any of the other global acts, regardless of genre.

MIKE G He’s a cultural icon and he’s growing outside of his core genre. The unique thing about Rauw — and what separated him from a lot of artists in certain key markets — is that he can do 50,000-plus tickets.

SCHAFER When we look at some of the tours internationally that we’ve been doing, including Rauw’s European leg that we did in the summer, you see the diverse markets and that those fans are there. Those fans are crossing over, even more so than what we’ve seen in the past.

MIKE G When you think about Rauw, he is in the conversation. His work ethic, high energy; he’s physically dynamic, he’s got a strong stage presence. He has that crossover appeal; he has a loyal fan base. The demand is big, it’s major. If he wanted to do stadiums next year, he could do it, but he needs to take a vacation first. He needs to put his phone down, rest, and when he’s ready, we can plan accordingly. He has that luxury.

RAUW I haven’t taken a break since I started touring this year. I began working on this tour after my birthday [Jan. 10] and continued working until today. My next vacation is going to be Christmas. After the holidays, I’m probably going to disappear for a while, but meanwhile, I’m already with a small notebook and taking notes for my next chapter. **B**

LEGEND OF LIVE USHER

WORK FOR EVERY BIT OF applause I get,” Usher told *Billboard* on the eve of his first Las Vegas residency in 2021. “I try my hardest to give people an incredible experience.”

That philosophy has propelled Usher’s 28-year touring career, which has taken him to arenas, residencies and the world’s largest stage: the Super Bowl. As a 19-year-old wunderkind in the late ’90s, he scored his first opening gigs for Mary J. Blige, Sean “Diddy” Combs and Janet Jackson. Fast forward to this year, when the 47-year-old superstar completed his most recent arena tour, Usher: Past Present Future.

The eight-time Grammy winner’s latest outing was the highest-grossing and best-selling tour of his career, according to *Billboard* Boxscore, grossing \$183.9 million and selling 1.1 million tickets over 80 shows. All told, Usher has a reported career gross of \$422.6 million from 3.3 million tickets over 334 shows. That’s a whole lot of singing and dancing — both of which are an innate part of Usher’s DNA.

Drawing comparisons to Michael Jackson while honing lithe dancing skills and his supple tenor, Usher graduated from opener to solo headliner in 2002 with his 8701 Evolution Tour in support of his third studio album, *8701*. Two years later, The Truth Tour, in support of his smash-hit album *Confessions*, became one of the period’s highest-grossing outings, with \$31.4 million earned.

Usher more than doubled that return with the 2010-11 OMG World Tour, which grossed \$75 million; the trek landed in seventh place on *Billboard*’s Top Tours chart in 2011.

But it was a post-pandemic foray into Las Vegas’ residency scene — suggested by manager Ron Laffitte well after Usher’s last tour in 2014 — that reintroduced and reinvigorated the R&B star’s musical legacy this decade. The first residency, *Usher: The Las Vegas Residency*, at Caesars Palace, did \$18.8 million and sold 84,000 tickets over 20 shows (2021-22). The second, *My Way: The Vegas Residency*, staged at the Dolby Live theater at Park MGM, garnered \$95.9 million and sold 394,000 tickets over 80 shows (2022-23). Those successes sparked a chain reaction that culminated in Usher’s critically acclaimed Super Bowl LVIII halftime performance and Past Present Future.

Usher’s singular status as a dynamic performer has led to his recognition as *Billboard*’s 2025 Legend of Live. For him, however, it’s the connection with his audience that counts most — and fuels his ongoing passion for performing.

“When it all comes together — the song, the connecting message to the audience, the dance — it almost feels like classical music,” Usher said ahead of his Super Bowl performance last year. “I just want to love what I do, make what I love, allow people to come to my space and see what I have to offer.”

—GAIL MITCHELL





Clockwise from opposite page: Usher onstage during his Past Present Future tour in Atlanta in 2024; his Apple Music Super Bowl LVIII Halftime Show in Las Vegas in 2024; his One Night Stand tour in New York in 2008; the grand opening of *My Way: The Las Vegas Residency* in 2022; the OMG World Tour in Kansas City, Mo., in 2010; with Lil Jon (left) and Ludacris on The Truth Tour in New York in 2004.



**TOURING
EXECUTIVE
OF THE YEAR**

**ARTHUR
FOGEL**

Chairman of global music/
president of global touring
LIVE NATION

The veteran promoter has long been the driving force behind some of the world's biggest tours — and, with Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Oasis and Coldplay on the road this year, 2025 has been no exception

BY KATIE BAIN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOEL BARHAMAND





Fogel photographed Sept. 18 at
Live Nation in Los Angeles.

AS TENS OF thousands of fans arrived at Toronto's Rogers Stadium on Aug. 24, their bucket hats — worn in homage to the night's headliner, Oasis — protected them from the sun that hung above in the azure sky. The atmosphere at this, the band's first North American show of its zeitgeist-shaking reunion tour, was convivial, communal, basically euphoric.

But inside the venue, Arthur Fogel sat in front of a weather radar and watched as a storm approached. The meteorologists gathered around him offered guidance: "It's moving at this speed. It has lightning in it. If it gets this close to the stadium, everyone inside has to go."

"So you're sitting there and you're stressing," Fogel says. "Like, 'Aw, fuck. They're saying it's going to come right over the top of the place.'"

Navigating dilemmas — at times as uncontrollable as the weather — has been part of Fogel's repertoire for roughly four decades, as he has helped guide some of the biggest musical superstars in history through major, and majorly lucrative, world tours.

On a September afternoon in his sprawling corner office at the Live Nation headquarters in Beverly Hills, his success is tangible. There's a yet-to-be-hung plaque celebrating Beyoncé's six sold-out shows at the United Kingdom's Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, a June run that earned \$61.6 million and sold 275,000 tickets, according to *Billboard* Boxscore. There are plaques for similarly massive achievements by Coldplay, U2, Madonna. An image of David Bowie commanding a stage during his 1990 Sound+Vision Tour hangs over the room's sitting area, where Fogel sinks into the couch in his office attire of black cargo pants and a black hoodie.

As Live Nation's chairman of global music/president of global touring, Fogel has helped these and other greats tour the world in a global market he has seen quadruple in size during his decades in the business. This year, Oasis, Lady Gaga and Beyoncé worked with Fogel to put on, respectively, the aforementioned reunion tour, the opera-themed Mayhem Ball and the country-centric *Cowboy Carter* spectacular — runs that collectively tallied 160 shows in 19 countries. Coldplay just performed 10 shows at Wembley Stadium, the longest consecutive run ever by an act at the venue, while 1.6 million people gathered on the beach in Rio de Janeiro to see Madonna play a free show in May 2024, a site Lady Gaga drew 2.5 million fans to a year later.

Successfully executing such epic concert endeavors has earned Fogel the trust of icons, a place in the Canadian Music History Hall of Fame and even his own documentary, 2013's *Who the F**k Is Arthur Fogel?*, in which his client and friend Bono helps answer the titular question by explaining that artists like Fogel because "he's calm." It's the kind of even temper that, for example, might help one navigate something like a freak thunderstorm hurtling toward a stadium full of rock fans.

"Even though inside I might be tied in knots, I think part of how you lead is to stay calm," Fogel says. "Being calm is part of what people look to you for in tough situations."

Today in his office, Fogel is soft-spoken but talkative, and one gets a sense of the steady presence that has helped him develop professional relationships that also transcend business, a goal since his early days in the Toronto rock scene. "The live business is very transactional, but in those early years as a musician and then working with artists as a tour manager, I knew I was looking for a different sort of relationship," he says.

He instead sought "the anti-transactional. It was like, 'How do I develop long-term relationships where I'm providing a service and an understanding, and I'm able

to converse with artists about different aspects of their career, and certainly about touring, on a global basis?' That became my fixation because it was, and to some degree still is, the great differentiator in my career — that global perspective."

To go global, however, one must still start local. Born and raised in Ottawa, Ontario, Fogel relocated to Toronto as a young adult and began playing drums in various bands before realizing, he says with a chuckle, "that if I wanted to get to a certain place in life, it wasn't going to be as a musician." He became the night manager of Toronto club The Edge, then started tour-managing a band that played there, Martha and the Muffins. Fogel was then hired at Concert Productions International by Michael Cohl, the touring impresario and eventual chairman of Live Nation. He was named president of the concert division of Cohl's Toronto-based company in 1986.

"Michael Cohl had the same view on global business," says Fogel, who worked with Cohl to book The Rolling Stones' 1989 *Steel Wheels* tour, a gargantuan 115-show, 19-country run "that really helped develop my understanding and expertise of putting together a major tour on a broad basis." Bowie's 1990 Sound+Vision Tour followed as Fogel settled into a long tenure at CPI. As the live sector consolidated in the late '90s and early 2000s, Fogel and Cohl's subsequent company, The Next Adventure, was acquired by SFX, where Fogel stayed as it merged with Clear Channel Entertainment and that company eventually spun off its concerts division as Live Nation in 2005. Fogel, who started working with U2 in 1997, Madonna in 2001 and Sting in 2004, became Live Nation's president of global touring in 2005. Beyoncé became a client in 2012; she and the rest of these icons — apart from Bowie, who stopped touring in 2004 and died in 2016 — remain Fogel's clients to this day.

"Arthur has always been a visionary, and we value his expertise in touring," U2's The Edge says. "Over many years working with him, we have come to depend on his great counsel. Our tours would not have been the same without him. Beyond that, he's a fantastic person and he has become a dear friend as well."

When Fogel started out, he says there were roughly 20 countries artists could tour. Now "there's probably 70 or 80. Over the last 20 years, globalization has expanded pretty much everywhere, except maybe the heart of Africa." This quadrupling of the market is "probably the most significant shift in the last 20 years... Artists are able to touch their fans everywhere in the world and generate an income everywhere in the world." The success of Bad Bunny, he adds, demonstrates how touring has not only opened geographically, but genre-wise. "I find that particularly gratifying," Fogel says.

Certainly, the kind of shows he tends to put on — Beyoncé flying through the air on a mechanical horse, Gaga in a chessboard dance-off with her past self, U2 playing under the cosmic glow of Las Vegas' Sphere when it performed the venue's opening residency in 2023 — help foster this global fascination. While putting a band onstage with a few lights "can and certainly does" work, Fogel says, "I like big; I like wow; I like the spectacle."

He has had no shortage of wow this year. Gaga's tour behind her new album, *MAYHEM*, started in April at Coachella, where Fogel was in the audience for the show's stunning debut. (While he "sort of had a sense of what was coming together, you never really know until you see and hear it, and it was awesome.") Fogel and Gaga, who've worked together since the early days of her career, debated putting the Mayhem Ball in arenas versus stadiums, ultimately deciding that its 87 dates would primarily be held in arenas.

"The last tour, for [2020's] *Chromatica*, was in stadiums,

and my feeling was that she should go back into arenas for multiple nights everywhere to reconnect with her fans in a different way," Fogel says. "This show is unbelievable in arenas; it's so powerful and so well done. She's an amazing talent, really is."

"Arthur has been by my side through some of the most defining moments of my touring career," Gaga says. "His vision, dedication and heart for the live experience have inspired me endlessly. I wouldn't be the artist I am today without his partnership."

Meanwhile, Oasis and its team "were quite convinced that stadiums were the way to go" for the band's first tour in 16 years, Fogel says. "I don't think there was ever any doubt, certainly in the U.K., about their strength and their ability to sell out stadiums... My gut said it was going to work, but I think everybody was a bit surprised at how big it was." He notes that the most significant challenge in bringing the reunion to market was simply keeping it a secret for six months before it was announced.

"You'd wake up every day going, 'Oh, fuck. Did somebody spill the beans?' Because it was very important to them that it not enter the rumor mill in a serious way."

Fogel and Beyoncé, meanwhile, decided on a residency structure for *Cowboy Carter*, where she played multiple nights in nine cities across the United States and Europe. Fogel says he and his clients make such decisions based on how much time a given artist wants to tour and how much of the world they want to reach. "Doing multiple shows in less cities is a model that's more prevalent now than ever," he says, "but the flip side is that if you don't go wide and touch your fans, eventually they kind of move on. You have to find that balance... I don't think the residency model serves the long-term strategy very well."

While these particular superstars can reliably play stadiums whenever they want, Fogel says a major development in the business is how stadium dates have opened to artists in earlier stages of their career. In previous eras, "playing stadiums was very rarefied air," he says. "In the last few years, the volume of stadium shows has continued to increase dramatically, and I don't see it really slowing down."

He attributes this development to the sense of community people feel when they're part of such a major event and to acts being "bigger than ever. The noise about artists and their music [and the culture around it] is so overpowering and motivating to people to want to be a part of it. It's pretty extraordinary."

As 2025 draws to a close, Fogel reports that from where he's sitting — which is, in this moment, still the couch, although he later relocates to his standing desk — "the business is in a great place."

Still, when your clients are simultaneously putting on several of the world's biggest tours, things can, and do, get thorny. "There was a period during the summer where Beyoncé was rolling, Oasis started, Gaga was out there, Sting was out there," Fogel says. "There was a lot of bouncing around, and it was a tough year just physically and mentally with travel. But the flip side is that that's a one-percenter problem, so you can't get too dramatic about it."

This is the even keel that artists love about Fogel, who ultimately watched the Toronto thunderstorm veer south of the stadium, taking the lightning with it and leaving some 39,000 fans joyfully singing "Don't Look Back in Anger" in a downpour.

"Stuff like that happens. I can give you a million stories where it's like, 'What the fuck? How is that happening?' But it's part of the game, part of what we do."

Fogel's trick is not just staying calm during challenges, but sometimes even enjoying them. "The rain," he says, "actually added to the vibe of the show."



PROMOTERS

LOUD AND LIVE

Nelson Albareda
CEO

LA FAMILIA PRESENTA

Aaron Ampudia
Christopher Den Uijl

Co-founders, La Familia Presenta, Baja Beach Fest, Sueños Festival, Coca-Cola Flow Fest, Hulaween FL, North Coast Music Festival, Dale MIXX, Collectiv Presents

C3 PRESENTS

Charles Attal
Charlie Walker

Presidents

Amy Corbin

Promoter; South region president of U.S. concerts, Live Nation

Huston Powell

Promoter

See story, page 49.

EVENKO

France Margaret Bélanger

President of sports and entertainment, Groupe CH

Nick Farkas

Senior vp of booking, concerts and events

Melissa Giampaolo

Vp of commercialization and festival management

FRONTIER TOURING

Dion Brant

CEO; president/CEO, AEG Presents Asia Pacific

Susan Heymann

COO



Peso Pluma at Los Angeles' Rolling Loud California on March 15.

CÁRDENAS MARKETING NETWORK

Henry Cárdenas
CEO

Carolina Daza

Head of live entertainment

Alexander Cárdenas

Director of touring

ROLLING LOUD

Tariq Cherif

Co-founder/co-CEO; founder, TC Music

Matt Zingler

Co-founder/co-CEO; founder, Motion Music

LIVE NATION INTERNATIONAL

Michael Coppel

Chairman, Live Nation Australia and New Zealand

Denis Desmond

Chairman, Live Nation UK and Ireland

John Reid

President of concerts, Europe, Middle East, Africa

Marek Lieberberg

Managing director/CEO, Live Nation Germany

Yongbae Cho

Steven Kim

Joint managing directors, Live Nation Korea

SIXTHMAN

Jeff Cuellar

CEO

MGM RESORTS

Paul Davis

Senior vp of booking

SUPERFLY PRESENTS AND OUTSIDE LANDS MUSIC FESTIVAL

Rick Farman

Co-founder

FENIX ENTERTAINMENT

Marcelo Figoli

Owner/CEO



Carpenter at Chicago's Lollapalooza on Aug. 3.

C3 PRESENTS

Charles Attal

Charlie Walker

Presidents

Amy Corbin

**Promoter; South
region president
of U.S. concerts,
Live Nation**

Huston Powell

Promoter

With headliners Sabrina Carpenter, Olivia Rodrigo, Doechii and Gracie Abrams, Lollapalooza's 2025 edition in Chicago sold out at on-sale. "Everything seemed to click this year," Powell says.

Still, the longtime C3 promoter considers Lollapalooza India's sold-out third edition — headlined by Green Day, Shawn Mendes, Louis Tomlinson and Glass Animals — to be the Austin-based company's biggest highlight this year. C3, whose festival properties also include Austin City Limits, Governors Ball and Bonnaroo, promoted the two-day March event in Mumbai alongside Lolla founder Perry Farrell and India-based promoter Book My Show.

Over the last decade-plus, Lollapalooza has expanded to Europe and South America with events from Buenos Aires to Berlin. But India, "which is not a place that's as heavily trafficked as any of the other markets we're in, has a lot of challenges with building the site and breaking into the market," Powell says. Most of the bands on the Lolla India lineup have never played in the country, he explains, and even headliners like Green Day had to make routing adjustments out of Australia to accommodate the booking. "It is expensive to get around. So to some extent, the band's got to want to do it," Powell says. "There's an emotional energy at the show because these fans, you can sense that they're looking at this as probably the one and only time they'll ever get to see Green Day."

But for the nation of nearly 1.5 billion, that may be changing — with Lollapalooza at the forefront. "It's been an untapped market," says Powell, who sees it becoming "a more viable touring market five, 10, 15 years down the road." —TAYLOR MIMS

LIVE NATION URBAN

Shawn Gee

President

Mari Davies

Vp of booking and talent

Tierra Booker

Manager, booking and talent

CONCERTS WEST

Paul Gongaware

John Meglen

Co-CEOs

BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE

Gary Guidry

Partner/CEO

Shelby Joyner

Partner/president

Troy Brown

Partner/chief marketing officer

Sulaiman Mausi

Partner/senior vp

Walt Reeder Jr.

Partner/senior vp of talent acquisitions

LIVE NATION H.I.P.

Kaori Hayashi

President

AEG INTERNATIONAL

Alex Hill

President/CEO

Adam Wilkes

President/CEO, Europe and Asia-Pacific,
AEG Presents

John Langford

COO, AEG Europe

Emma Bownes

Senior vp of venue programming,
AEG Europe

Simon Jones

Senior vp of international touring,
AEG Presents



VISIONARY

KEVIN LYMAN

**Founder,
Vans Warped Tour**

BY TAYLOR MIMS

Kevin Lyman remembers the strong pushback he got in the 1980s from local politicians when he would attempt to host punk shows in Long Beach, Calif., which then (like now) drew mischievous teens and young adults from all around Southern California with its notorious skate and punk culture. So naturally, over 40 years later, Lyman chose the beachside city as one of three sites to host the 30th-anniversary edition of his Vans Warped Tour — the famed touring punk rock festival he founded — this year.

“We outlasted them all,” Lyman says two months after the two-day Long Beach festival sold out 80,000 tickets with performances from Pennywise, Less Than Jake, The Vandals and the city’s own Sublime.

Today, Warped has the local buy-in it once lacked. In June, Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson celebrated Warped’s return at an event honoring a new street named Sublime Way. “He goes, ‘I’m so excited to bring you the biggest punk rock show ever to Long Beach,’” Lyman recalls. “I was with Joe [Escalante] from The Vandals and a few other band people, and we all

looked at each other. I go, ‘Remember when the politicians used to run on how they were going to get rid of punk in Long Beach?’”

Alongside Long Beach, Washington, D.C., and Orlando, Fla., were named as host cities for the anniversary events, which according to Warped sold a combined 240,000 tickets — making Warped one of the most successful festival runs of the year. (After summer plays in D.C. and Long Beach, the fest will stage its Orlando shows on Nov. 15 and 16.) And Warped, which took a break between 2019 and 2025, already has tickets on sale for its 2026 editions in D.C. and Long Beach, with Lyman hinting that international dates are also in the works. According to him, roughly 80% of next year’s acts have already been booked.

Warped launched in 1995 and grew to roughly 35 dates a summer in the United States and Canada, adding international stops in Australia and the United Kingdom throughout the years. The punk gathering was part of a spate of touring festivals that emerged in the 1990s, including Lollapalooza, H.O.R.D.E. and Lilith Fair. H.O.R.D.E. and Lilith Fair called it quits before the new millennium, while Lollapalooza eventually settled down to one main location in Chicago with frequent international editions. But Warped had impressive longevity. After being held annually for more than 20 years, it executed its final cross-country trek in 2018 and marked its

Fans crowd-surfed at the July 26 tour date in Long Beach, Calif.



“We’re in a society where we’re bombarded with negativity. If you could create that atmosphere of positivity within a parking lot, they start to come together and you can affect people.”

Avril Lavigne joined the tour lineup in June.



25th anniversary with three shows in 2019.

By then, Lyman was burned out — and felt fans and the industry were taking Warped for granted. He continued to work on other live events and philanthropic endeavors while pivoting to teaching full time at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music. Post-pandemic, he noticed his students were struggling to connect with one another and decided a new generation could use Warped.

Young people “were so isolated from each other. We’re in a society where we’re bombarded

with negativity,” he says. “If you could create that atmosphere of positivity within a parking lot, they start to come together and you can affect people.”

Warped’s return coincided with a renewed interest in the punk and emo genres. Early Warped bookings such as blink-182, Green Day, Weezer and Fall Out Boy have recently sold out stadiums, while the Las Vegas package festival When We Were Young — which featured a slew of Warped alums including Alkaline Trio, Dashboard Confessional and Good Charlotte — became a post-pandemic hit.

For Warped’s 30th anniversary, Lyman teamed with the Live Nation-owned Insomniac (producers of EDM festivals such as Electric Daisy Carnival and Beyond

Wonderland) for the event’s biggest dates yet. The shows featured larger stages, merchandise tables for every band, an on-site Warped Tour Museum and a Charity Circle with 25 nonprofit organizations. But in keeping with its original ethos, two-day general admission tickets started at \$149 to keep the festival accessible, and, in old Warped style, set times for the lineups of more than 90 bands were not announced ahead of time. In Long Beach, gates opened at 9 a.m., two hours earlier than planned, to accommodate the mass of fans who had arrived early. By

11 a.m., more than 30,000 attendees were inside, providing uncharacteristically large audiences for early acts.

“There’s a whole new energy of bands out there that Warped can be a part of the puzzle of their development,” Lyman says, pointing to standout performances from rising artists on 2025’s lineup like LØLØ, Honey Revenge and Magnolia Park. “I did not want to create a legacy show. I didn’t want to create nostalgia. You’re, of course, going to have that. You’re going to tap into your history. But for me, I was looking forward to the future of bands and community.”

Over the 30 years of Warped, Lyman has seen bands grow from opening acts to headliners — bands that the festival booked early in their careers include My Chemical Romance, No Doubt, Paramore and Panic! at the Disco — and he has witnessed kids transition from waiting hours at the gates to producing the tours themselves. The tour has also been a critical mechanism for educating a generation (or two) of young people about punk music and culture. “You become a very large classroom. That’s what we used to do across the country,” he says. “We’re never going to go across the country with 35 shows again. Physically, I couldn’t do it, and physically, I would insist on being there. I’d have a shallow grave somewhere in a parking lot in America at this point, but we’ll keep doing what we can.”

Lyman’s grateful to have built a career on bringing people together over great music. (He even did his own autograph signings at the most recent Warped dates.) And as the 64-year-old steward of the event ages, he tries to instill one motto in the youth he encounters: “You can do good business and do good with your business.”

IGLESIAS ENTERTAINMENT

Jorge Iglesias

Founder/CEO

TEG

Geoff Jones

Chair

Paul Dainty

President/CEO, TEG Dainty

Toby Leighton-Pope

Managing director, TEG Europe

HYBE

Min E. Kang

Leader of concert business division

FEMME IT FORWARD

Heather Lowery

President/CEO

VANS WARPED TOUR

Kevin Lyman

Founder/producer

See story, page 50.

AEG PRESENTS

Jay Marciano

Chairman/CEO; COO, AEG

Rich Schaefer

President of global touring

Brent Fedrizzi

President of North American regional offices

Shawn Trell

Executive vp/COO/general counsel

Brooke Michael Kain

Chief digital officer

MARSHALL ARTS

Barrie Marshall

Chairman/managing director

BIZARRO LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Alfredo Alonso

Founder/entertainment director

Daniel Merino

Entertainment manager

MESSINA TOURING GROUP

Louis Messina

CEO

Mike Dugan

President

Haley McCollister

President, Messina Touring Group
Nashville

Rome McMahon

Executive vp

THE BOWERY PRESENTS

John Moore

Co-founder/co-president

Jim Glancy

Co-president

SJM CONCERTS

Simon Moran

Managing director

ANOTHER PLANET ENTERTAINMENT

Gregg Perloff

CEO

Sherry Wasserman

Co-founder/president

Allen Scott

President of concerts and festivals;
co-founder/producer, Outside Lands

LIVE NATION

Michael Rapino

President/CEO

Arthur Fogel

Chairman of global music/president of
global touring

See story, page 44.

Omar Al-joulani

President of touring

Jared Braverman

Rick Franks

Lesley Olenik

Hans Schafer

Senior vps of touring



GETTING THE JOB DONE

After exploding in popularity last year, Chappell Roan wanted tickets for her latest outing to go to die-hard fans — and found industry partners to make that happen

BY DAN RYS AND LYNDSEY HAVENS



Roan at Queens' Forest Hills Stadium in September.

WHEN CHAPPELL ROAN began contemplating her return to the stage after the biggest year of her professional career — one that included a series of record-breaking festival performances and culminated in a Grammy for best new artist — she had a clear vision for how she wanted to do it.

“She loves the feeling of a festival-style show, where people can dance and be free of fixed systems,” says Kiely Mosiman, one of Roan’s agents at Wasserman Music. “So we came up with the initial idea of, essentially, building festival sites — but just for Chappell’s show.”

Together with Mosiman and Roan’s team at Foundations Management, Roan devised a series of fall pop-up performances in New York, Los Angeles and Kansas City, Mo. — the biggest city in her home state — directly catering to her biggest fans. But Roan’s camp was concerned that, rather than reaching the hands of those fans, the bots and scalpers that troll high-demand concert on-sales would scoop up tickets for the shows, looking to flood the secondary market with up-charged tickets and make a healthy profit on resales.

Roan outlined that focus in a July Instagram post announcing the eight dates that would begin Sept. 20 in New York and run through Oct. 11 in L.A. “Because we’re only coming to three cities,” she wrote, “I wanted to make sure 1. we’re keeping ticket prices as affordable as possible and 2. we’re trying to keep them away from scalpers.”

That’s easier said than done. In an era of soaring concert ticket prices and a bot issue that has become so pervasive that Congress has gotten involved, star artists — particularly those who exploded in popularity as quickly as Roan did over the past 12 months — are often frustrated by the difficulties in reaching their biggest fans and catering to those who supported them from the beginning.

To do so, Roan and her team turned to Fair AXS, a program by ticketing partner AXS that aimed to deliver on her vision. As opposed to typical tour rollouts, which usually employ a presale and a general on-sale and are often inundated by bots that buy out inventory

instantaneously and astronomically inflate prices on the secondary market, Fair AXS took a slower, more methodical approach. Fans signed up over a three-day period, after which AXS used a proprietary system to verify that each registrant was a real person who maybe even had purchased Roan tickets in the past. AXS then delivered a list of such registrants to her agents at Wasserman. The Wasserman team released a tranche of ticket-purchasing invitations to fans across a 24-hour period and then, based on the ratio of those fans who actually purchased the tickets, released a second tranche the following day and a third the day after. The result takes much longer than a traditional on-sale — and naturally eschews the “instant sellout” publicity rush — but the demand for Roan was such that there never needed to be a fully open public on-sale, and the process delivered on her goals.

“When you have an artist that wants to do something like this and then you have really strong agents and managers in their corner who will take the time to agree on a plan, it’s incredibly effective,” says Dean DeWulf, head of venues, North America at AXS. “She chose to focus on fairness for her fans, even when she could have priced tickets higher.”

Still, for Roan, the result paid off handsomely: The first six shows of the run — four at Forest Hills Stadium in Queens and two at Liberty Memorial Park in Kansas City — grossed \$15.4 million and sold 123,000 tickets, according to Billboard Boxscore, with the two L.A. dates yet to be reported. The process took around two weeks, between the three-day registration window, the seven days during which AXS vetted millions of registrations and the three days of offering the approved fans tickets. But just as important to her team at Foundations, Wasserman and AXS was the response to the shows, where almost every attendee was outfitted in cowboy hats, glitter and hand-made costumes.

“It really did feel like everyone was a part of a community in a way that I haven’t felt at a show in a really long time,” Mosiman says. “I think sometimes it gets lost how much Kayleigh [Amstutz, Roan’s real name] really does care about fans and their experience. And she

absolutely was part of this process, putting in the work from day one to do it at this scale.”

Scale, now, is the big test for this program. It has been around for several years but has been used most often for one-off specialty shows, such as big-name underplays at small venues (Paul McCartney used it, for example, when he played California’s 4,500-capacity Santa Barbara Bowl in September) or at special venues like Red Rocks in Colorado. Acts such as ODESZA, Vampire Weekend, Billy Strings and Sturgill Simpson have used it, while perhaps the biggest proof of concept came from Zach Bryan’s tour in 2023, which utilized the program across its entire 32-date run, with face-value resale exchange.

And while artists may be leaving money on the table — the general admission price for Roan’s shows was \$99 when they could have easily been priced much higher — there are other benefits the program provides artists, in addition to fostering community and rewarding the loyalty of devoted fans. “Artists are so disintermediated from their fans today,” DeWulf says. With this program, “they can actually know who the fans are. Being able to give that information to not only the artist camp but also to the promoter is very helpful for them to understand where the fans are, to route the tour to bigger venues next time and add more shows.”

Roan’s next move, as she put it in her announcement, will be “going away to write the next album.” And when she tours behind that release, it will be on the arena — or, perhaps, even the stadium — level. But her connection with her fans in the live environment has now been cemented — and AXS may have a solution to the increasingly impersonal process involved in establishing that connection.

“Ticketing, over the last 20 years, has become so monolithic, so opaque, so confusing, and it’s made it easy for bad actors to completely arbitrage the tickets, create scarcity and inflate prices,” DeWulf says. “But at the end of the day, ticketing is deeply personal. We’re in the fan connection business, and people care so deeply about these artists. That connection that we’re powering is so human and personal. And this is a very personal approach.”

GLOBAL TOURING ICON SHAKIRA

It was supposed to be a North American arena tour. When Shakira first announced her *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran* outing in April 2024, the route took her to arenas across the continent that fall. But within months, it morphed into something else. Buoyed by the sustained success of her album of the same name — the set, released by Sony Music Latin, debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Top Latin Albums and Latin Pop Albums charts — and her subsequent viral single, “Soltera,” live demand for Shakira exploded. That October, she announced Latin American stadium dates for early 2025 — and scrapped her North American arena tour, instead announcing a mix of stadium and arena dates for the continent for May and June 2025.

That bold move has paid off handsomely. Through the 82-show tour's first 64 dates, Shakira grossed \$327.4 million and sold 2.5 million tickets, according to *Billboard* Boxscore. And the Live Nation-promoted tour also has a place in history: Shakira now boasts the highest-grossing Latin tour ever by a woman and the second highest-grossing Latin tour ever (behind only Luis Miguel's 2023-24 outing, which grossed \$409.5 million).

The tour's sales include her historic 12-concert run at Mexico City's Estadio GNP Seguros — the most shows a single tour has ever played at the iconic venue formerly known as Foro Sol. Shakira sold 65,000 tickets per night, according to promoter OCESA, for a total of 780,000 tickets sold.

Shakira, who returned to the road on Oct. 25 for a run of 17 Latin American stadium dates that will take her through mid-December, is approaching Miguel's record mark — and she has yet to announce a possible European leg of the tour. She'll end 2025 with two Up Close & Personal shows at Miami's Hard Rock Casino on Dec. 27 and 28.

Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran and its subsequent tour followed Shakira's high-profile heartbreak and divorce. “I believe this has been a healing process for me and for many people — not just women; men, too. I think together we've learned that you grow from setbacks and that together we heal when we support each other,” she told *Billboard* backstage at one of her Mexico City shows in March. “These are more than just concerts. They're very profound gatherings where healing happens. With each show, I feel stronger and happier.”

—LEILA COBO

Shakira kicked off her *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran* world tour in Rio de Janeiro in February.

GLOBAL TALENT SERVICES

Narcis Rebollo

President/CEO

MOVE CONCERTS

Phil Rodriguez

CEO; CEO, Move Management/Grand Move Records

Alejandro Pabón

Managing director/promoter; head of operations, Rimas Nation

INSOMNIAC

Pasquale Rotella

Founder/CEO

SEMMEI CONCERTS

Dieter Semmelmann

CEO

DAYGLO PRESENTS

Peter Shapiro

Founder

BILL SILVA PRESENTS AND BILL SILVA MANAGEMENT

Bill Silva

CEO

OUTBACK PRESENTS

Michael Smardak

Founder/co-CEO

OCESA

Alejandro Soberón

CEO

Mario Villa Vera

Operations director

FKP SCORPIO GROUP

Stephan Thanscheidt

CEO, FKP Scorpio

Rauha Kyyrö

President of touring and artist development

Rense van Kessel

President of touring and artist development, FKP Scorpio Group/Friendly Fire

GOLDENVOICE

Paul Tollett

President

Melissa Ormond

COO, Goldenvoice; COO of festivals, AEG Presents

Stacy Vee

Jenn Yacoubian

Executive vps

COUNTRY THUNDER MUSIC FESTIVALS

Troy Vollhoffer

President/CEO, Premier Global Production/Country Thunder Music Festivals

DANNY WIMMER PRESENTS

Danny Wimmer

Founder

ROAM

John Bongiorno

Alex Bruford

Ali Hedrick

Erik Selz

Partners/agents

With marquee clients including Goose and Khruangbin, independent agency Arrival Artists was already poised for a massive year. Then, in September, it merged with the U.K.-based ATC Live, creating ROAM, a powerhouse that represents over 800 artists. “ROAM gives us the ability to take things to the next level, providing thoughtful, creative representation at a global scale across a wide spectrum of genres while keeping our artists at the heart of everything we do,” says Bongiorno, who was part of Arrival’s founding cohort in 2020.

“ROAM was born out of the idea that you don’t have to choose between scale and individuality,” he explains, adding that the merger was “about rolling up our sleeves and creating something the industry hasn’t really seen before.”

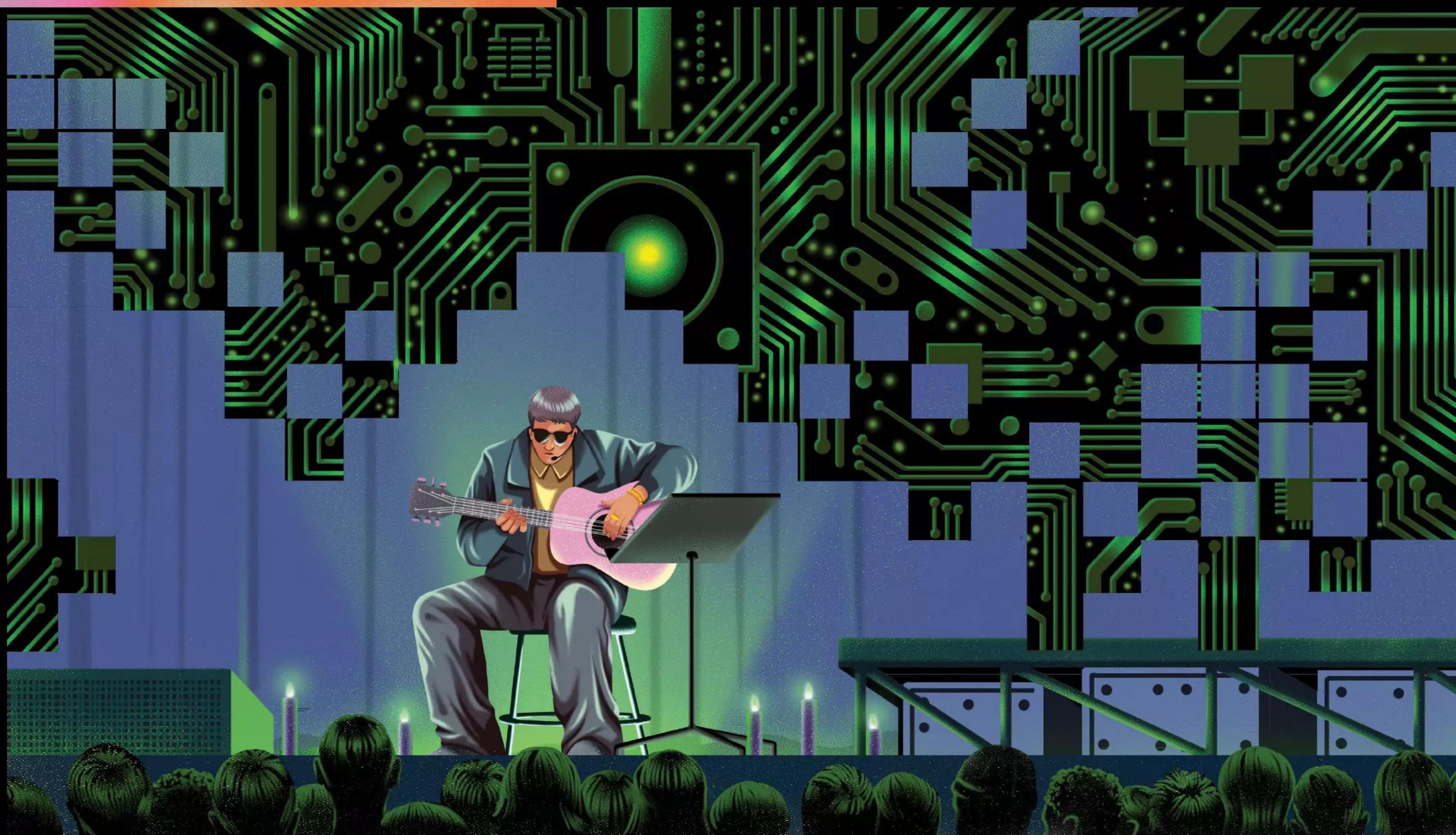
ROAM now has more than 80 employees across offices in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, London, Paris and Glasgow — and the type of bespoke representation it promises is only growing



Goose at its Viva el Gonzo 2025 music festival in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico, in May.

more important in the rapidly evolving booking space. “We are using our deep understanding of the local markets, close analysis of the data and forward-thinking ticketing strategies to help our artists navigate the changing touring landscape,” Bongiorno says, describing skills he says “need to be part of every agent’s repertoire.”

Ultimately, Bongiorno says, “a concert isn’t just a show anymore; it’s the anchor in an artist’s world that’s constantly in motion. As agents, the blueprint needs to be about turning fleeting moments into meaningful, lasting impact.” —ERIC RENNER BROWN



LIVE'S LOOMING AI REVOLUTION

Promoters, agents and marketers are already using artificial intelligence to fight bots, streamline shows and personalize discovery — and this emerging tech could soon transform every job in touring

BY DAVE BROOKS

ILLUSTRATION BY GLENN HARVEY

SOLD-OUT CONCERTS have a certain timelessness. Fans rush the merchandise booth, crews tune guitars, and promoters pace the lobby while managers huddle with their artists in the greenroom. But beneath that familiar surface, the live-music business is being rewired. The systems guiding who gets through security fastest, how merch is stocked, which shows get routed where and how lights sync to the beat are no longer governed by human instinct alone. Increasingly, they're powered by artificial intelligence — and the emerging technology's impact will only deepen in the decade ahead.

"Live music has always been a people business, but in the next five to 10 years, it will also become a much more sophisticated data business," explains Tash Singh, founder of Fusible.ai, one of several startups helping major music companies develop AI strategies for the future.

"The shift won't erase human roles, but it will fundamentally change them," Singh continues, noting that soon, decisions once made solely with human knowl-

edge and instinct will increasingly be guided in real time by algorithms. The transformation is already visible in today's biggest tours — and it's a preview of what's to come across the entire ecosystem of live entertainment.

From booking agents and promoters to ticketing and marketing, AI is reshaping how concerts are planned, sold, secured and experienced. The concert business has always adapted to new technologies — from radio spots to MTV to streaming. AI represents the next leap forward. And, its proponents say, AI in the touring sector won't make it less human; if anything, it could make concerts feel more personal, efficient and accessible. If the industry gets this transition right, the future of live music won't feel robotic — it'll feel smoother, smarter and more alive.

MASTERING REALITY

A major frontier in this era is how AI can help discern between human ticket buyers and fraudulent ones.

Bots and fake accounts continue to plague ticketing, scooping up seats before fans do and inflating ticket prices. Recently, the Federal Trade Commission sued a Florida-based ticket broker for paying employees to operate multiple accounts. The agency also targeted Ticketmaster for failing to enforce its own rules surrounding bots.

"Fundamentally, the internet never built a way to prove someone is a real human," says Adrian Ludwig, chief trust officer at Tools for Humanity. The company is behind World ID, a privately held, anonymous proof-of-humanness system designed to stop individuals from creating hundreds of fake accounts. "That gap has allowed bots to flourish across industries, from online gaming and dating to concert ticketing."

World ID works by having users visit one of its "orbs," chrome-like cameras located at places like shopping centers and office buildings that scan a person's face and iris to confirm they're a unique, living human. That biometric signature generates a digital ID stored privately on the user's phone, which can then verify the user's identity online without revealing per-

sonal information. (OpenAI CEO Sam Altman co-founded Tools for Humanity and serves as its chairman.)

Meanwhile, in South Korea, ticketing platform Event Pop is piloting AI-driven technology to curb scalping and bot-driven hoarding. Ludwig, whose company powers Event Pop, says discussions are underway with major global ticketing firms to deploy the tech in other regions, including the United States. “The goal is simple: one person, one account, one ticket,” he says. “It doesn’t matter if you’re Green Day playing the Fillmore or a massive stadium show — fans should trust that tickets go to real people first, not bots.”

To meet that challenge, companies like Ticketmaster are increasingly turning to AI to safeguard ticket sales. Traditional defenses like CAPTCHA tests or IP blocking can’t keep up with modern automation. Instead, AI-driven behavioral analysis tracks users’ real-time interactions with a site: how a mouse hovers, how quickly a user types, the hesitation before clicking “buy.” “Bots execute commands with mechanical precision and inhuman speed, leaving behind a digital fingerprint that machine learning models can easily flag,” says Jason Webb, co-founder of Tixel, a Los Angeles-based fan-to-fan marketplace that is developing AI tools to prevent fraud.

Ticketmaster has confirmed it uses AI-powered “bot mitigation tools” to identify suspicious traffic and employs adaptive firewalls that become smarter with every attempted attack. In October, the company announced former Square executive Saumil Mehta as its new global president; Mehta has recently advised AI startups. “Under his leadership, Ticketmaster will execute AI opportunities across key areas of its business, such as empowering venues, fortifying the ticketing infrastructure against bad actors and enhancing the ticket-buying experience for fans,” Ticketmaster stated in a press release. (The company declined to comment for this story.)

“The next phase,” Webb says, “involves natural language processing to analyze the text of form submissions and search queries. The result is a constantly evolving security layer that learns and adapts faster than static code-based defenses. While no system is foolproof, AI detection represents a major leap forward in protecting fans’ access to face-value tickets.”

VENUES OF CHANGE

Inside venues, AI is already reshaping how fans move, spend and experience shows. During Elton John’s recent Farewell Yellow Brick Road tour, arenas deployed Evolv’s AI-powered scanners to process fans through security faster. Other venues use WaitTime, which utilizes overhead cameras to predict and prevent long concession lines. Fans might not notice the algorithms — but they’ll notice shorter waits for a drink.

Atlanta’s State Farm Arena, home to the NBA’s Hawks and one of the busiest concert buildings in the Southeast, has become a testing ground for AI-powered venue operations. “We’ve invested in crowd analytics that monitor foot traffic throughout our 17,000-capacity arena,” said Geoffrey Stiles, senior vp of facilities and events for the Hawks, during an online presentation on AI in arenas hosted by *Sports Business Journal* in October.

By combining video feeds with machine learning, the arena’s system can anticipate bottlenecks at entrances,

Atlanta’s State Farm Arena uses predictive tools to optimize staffing and concessions.



restrooms and concessions, enabling staff to act before problems arise. Stiles added: “The technology has significantly reduced wait times and improved crowd flow during high-volume events.”

State Farm Arena also uses predictive tools to optimize staffing and concessions, analyzing historical sales and real-time demand to deploy workers and adjust inventory on the fly, resulting in faster service and less waste.

Earlier this year, the arena partnered with spatial intelligence company AiFi and Verizon for Hawks Express Cashierless Checkout, a store that used AiFi’s technology and Verizon’s 5G Edge technology to help fans purchase concessions without waiting in line. State Farm Arena has also partnered with Honeywell, the technology and manufacturing company that is active in both machine learning and AI, on the Arena of the Future Innovation Challenge, which focuses on developing automation and sustainability solutions.

“Large arenas and theaters are complex facilities with massive HVAC, lighting and security systems,” says Dani Stern, senior director of product management for commercial real estate at Honeywell, who also spoke at the *Sports Business Journal* presentation. “By running AI models on data from sensors across the building, operators can predict when equipment is likely to fail, automatically adjust energy use to crowd levels and reduce costs while improving reliability.” AI-driven lighting systems, he notes, can even brighten or dim areas based on traffic flow, keeping fans safe while saving power.

STAGE MEETS SCREEN

The line between live and digital performance is blurring fastest onstage. In London, *ABBA Voyage* proved a residency can thrive on AI-powered avatars, grossing over \$150 million in its first year, according to *Bloomberg*. KISS is now working with Pophouse Entertainment and Industrial Light & Magic to extend its legacy through digital doubles, signaling that some acts may never truly retire.

Meanwhile, artists like deadmau5 and Eric Prydz are using AI to generate visuals that evolve in real time with the music, and Travis Scott’s 2020 Fortnite concert, attended virtually by 12 million fans, showed what happens when gaming engines and AI-assisted animation meet live performance.

For younger audiences, these hybrid experiences are becoming the norm. A teenager who has seen a virtual

reality avatar set won’t blink when a future festival lineup includes an artist’s AI-powered digital counterpart. Today’s youth expect fluidity between screens and stages — where an artist might perform simultaneously in Los Angeles and inside a virtual world, or where fans customize lighting and visuals from their phones in real time. In this new landscape, authenticity isn’t tied to physical presence but to participation: Fans want to shape the moment, not just witness it. It’s a future where an AI-generated encore isn’t a gimmick, but another layer of creativity in a live experience that never really ends.

SMARTER ROUTING

Touring has always been a logistical puzzle. Routing 20 cities for a six-week tour means balancing venue availability, crew schedules and gut instincts about demand. Soon, AI will handle much of that math.

“Imagine an agent planning an arena run in 2030,” Singh says. “We can blend Spotify data, YouTube velocity and past ticket curves with external factors like sports calendars, carbon impact of fan travel — even diesel costs for buses.”

With those inputs, Singh says, “you can model different scenarios: one maximizing gross, another minimizing emissions or one balancing both. Instead of arguing from instinct alone, teams [can] negotiate with real-time data.”

Other startups are offering similar routing and carbon optimization tools, while major promoters are testing predictive demand systems. Over time, Singh believes, these tools will become indispensable — the invisible co-pilots of every tour.

While Live Nation and AEG declined to comment at length for this story, the major promoters both acknowledged that they are in the early stages of developing their AI strategies, primarily focused on ticketing and marketing. But as one powerful agent tells *Billboard*, even if more ambitious uses of AI remain on the horizon, the technology is already changing how industry professionals approach their work.

“The hope is that AI makes it easier to advance shows, whether that means more quickly reading contracts or negotiating with venues to route a 40-city tour,” the agent says. “Anything that can free up the more mundane tasks that take up hours of my time so I can instead focus on signing and developing new talent is something we’re very interested in exploring further.”

AGENCIES

WASSERMAN MUSIC

Lee Anderson
President

Marty Diamond
James Rubin
Kevin Shivers
Brent Smith

Executive vps/managing executives

See story, page 59.

INDEPENDENT ARTIST GROUP

Dennis Arfa
Chairman, music division

Marsha Vlasic
Vice chairman, music division

Jarred Arfa
Executive vp/global head of music

PRIMARY TALENT INTERNATIONAL

Matt Bates
Managing partner/CEO

TBA AGENCY

Marshall Betts
Avery McTaggart
Managing partners

Amy Davidman
Devin Landau
Partners

ROAM

John Bongiorno
Alex Bruford
Ali Hedrick
Erik Selz
Partners/agents

See story, page 55.

ROC NATION

Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter
Owner

Jay Brown
Vice chairman

Desiree Perez
CEO

WME

Lucy Dickins
Kirk Sommer
Global co-heads of contemporary music and touring

Becky Gardenhire
Joey Lee
Jay Williams
Co-heads of country music

WK ENTERTAINMENT

Pascual Egea
Head of Europe

Carlos Pinilla
Senior vp of commercial

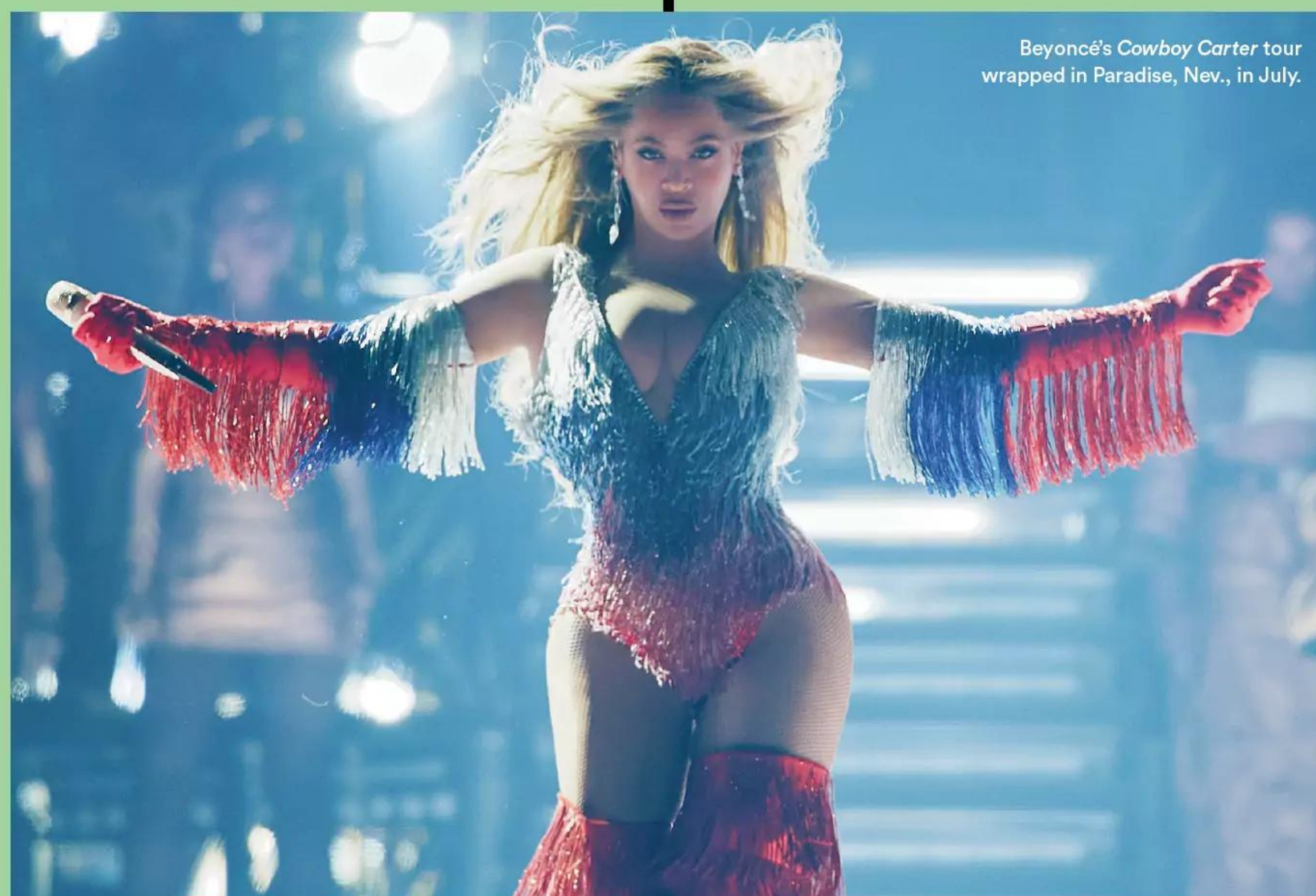
SOUND TALENT GROUP

Beth Keith
Partner/agent; manager, Alexandra Kay

UTA

Samantha Kirby Yoh
David Zedeck
Partners/co-heads of global music

Mike G
Jbeau Lewis
Partners/agents, music



Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter* tour wrapped in Paradise, Nev., in July.

CARA LEWIS GROUP

Cara Lewis
Founder/CEO

MAC AGENCY

Andrew Lieber
Founder/CEO

Ashley Ventura
Former agent

CAA

Rob Light
Managing director

Emma Banks
Darryl Eaton
Rick Roskin
Co-heads of global touring

Matt Galle
Music agent

THE NEAL AGENCY

Austin Neal
Founder/co-head

Adi Sharma
Co-head/agent

Marisa Mineo
Head of tour marketing

ONE FIINIX LIVE

Jon Ollier
CEO

HIGH ROAD TOURING

Frank Riley
Founder



Lamar and SZA during the Apple Music Super Bowl LIX Halftime Show in New Orleans in February.

WASSERMAN MUSIC

Lee Anderson

President

Marty Diamond

James Rubin

Kevin Shivers

Brent Smith

Executive vps/managing executives

When Coachella announced its 2026 lineup this fall, Wasserman Music’s roster accounted for one-third of the festival’s bookings — at 33%, nearly three times the 12% marks its competitors WME, UTA and CAA each posted. The figure captures Wasserman’s influence in the modern concert business. Four-and-a-half years after the agency powerhouse acquired Paradigm Talent Agency’s North American live-music assets to create Wasserman Music, the division has become one of the live sector’s most dominant players across genres, levels and territories. (Wasserman acquired Paradigm’s U.K. live-music business the following year.) And, as Anderson tells it, it’s only just gaining its sea legs.

“We’ve added a ton of really smart, experienced, talented professionals in a lot of different areas, and we’ve really figured out how we work well together as a team around each client,” says Anderson, a 20-year agency veteran who assumed his current role in June 2024. “When you put those things together, you get that Voltron effect of how to really support each client and there’s chemistry there. We’re starting to reach critical mass on that all working well together, and [in 2026], that’s going to yield some really, really exceptional 360 results.”

The agency’s success in 2025 will be a tough act to follow. According to Billboard Boxscore, four artists Wasserman represents globally logged nine-figure-grossing tours: Kendrick Lamar and SZA (whose co-headlining Grand National Tour raked in \$358.7 million), Imagine Dragons (\$208.6 million) and Tyler, The Creator (\$174.4 million). Another two acts that the agency books in the United States and Canada, Coldplay and Ed Sheeran, also grossed nine figures on the road in 2025. Coldplay’s *Music of the Spheres* tour collected \$379.3 million from 1.6 million tickets, bringing the total tickets for the tour, which launched in 2022, to 13.1 million — more than any in history, including Taylor Swift’s The Eras Tour. And the dominance extended well beyond these world-conquering mega-headliners. Wasserman talent from dance (Disclosure, Dom Dolla) to Americana and folk (Tyler Childers, The Lumineers) to Latin (Kali Uchis, Anuel AA) to hip-hop (Ice Cube, GloRilla) to pop (Lorde, Laufey) logged major touring years in 2025. (So did an act that Anderson has seen more than 100 times: jam icon Phish.)

Wasserman Music’s team has more than tripled since its creation, to a total of about 480 employees, and Anderson attributes much of its success to this growth, which hasn’t been limited to agents. The firm has invested in data science and analytics to bolster its work, and offers its clients more resources and support — from brand partnerships to opportunities in film, gaming and more — than ever. “What we’ve really tried to do is add extensions to the management team inside of the agency to allow them to tap into all the opportunities we have,” he explains.

It’s all in service of a roster that Anderson takes every opportunity to praise. “We have the fortune to work with so many incredible artists,” he says. “Sometimes I have to sit and pinch myself. It’s really wild.” —E. R. B.



MERCH MADNESS

As president of Bravado, Matt Young oversees the world's largest music merchandise operation — and from that perch, he's envisioning the merch sector of the future

BY DAVE BROOKS

IN TODAY'S MUSIC economy, where streaming royalties remain thin and ticket prices continue to escalate, one of the fastest-growing and most resilient sectors is merchandise — and few companies are as prominent in the space as Universal Music Group's wholly owned Bravado, which oversees the world's largest music merchandise operation.

Bravado aims to unite artists and fans through products that aspire to be more than souvenirs, and at the center of its machine is its president, Matt Young. A 25-year merchandising veteran who joined Bravado four years ago, Young has shepherded the company through an era

of unprecedented demand and logistical complexity, helping Bravado grow into a revenue engine that UMG says now generates over \$900 million in annual business. But those top-line numbers tell only part of the story.

"We're building bridges," Young says, "allowing fans to touch something physical that represents the emotional connection they have to the music."

Young's path to Bravado traces the broader arc of the merch industry. He began at Roadrunner Records in the late 1990s, when the label had started to flirt with what would become known as "360 deals," which bundled merchandising with recording and touring rights. From

there, he spent time at an independent merch company before moving on to Warner Music and helping it build its merchandise division. "I've seen this industry from every angle: indie, major, startups," he says.

By the time Young joined Bravado in 2021, the merch sector had begun to mature into a sophisticated global business with its own supply chains and sustainability strategies. In his role, he oversees customized blueprints for artists who range from global superstars like Billie Eilish and The Rolling Stones to emerging bands on the club circuit. About one-quarter of Bravado's roster is non-UMG acts, and the company's model spans from tour merch sold directly at concerts to retail partnerships with American outlets like Hot Topic and others in Europe and Asia.

"Tickets and T-shirts," Young muses, are now twin pillars of the touring economy, with some artists selling hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of items in a single night. For certain acts, particularly those with deeply engaged fans, the merch table rivals the box office as a source of income. This shift has also forced the industry to rethink product design, moving away from one-size-fits-all T-shirts toward fashion-forward collections, sustainable fabrics, upcycled inven-

tory, exclusive colored vinyl, collectible collaborations and even action figures.

Meanwhile, the evolution of VIP experiences has further blurred the line between merch and fan engagement. Bravado's premium programs for artist tours range from simple early-entry packages to elaborate meet-and-greet activations that command thousands of dollars. For bands like Pierce the Veil, VIP passes that grant barricade access and exclusive goodie bags have become essential fan experiences, while legacy acts like Def Leppard and KISS have offered photo ops and once-in-a-lifetime perks.

Yet challenges remain. The company must navigate tariffs and geopolitical disruptions to supply chains and shipping routes while managing its inventory and combating bootleggers — both the ones who have long hawked counterfeit shirts outside arenas and those in the Wild West of digital merch, where Instagram

scammers selling fake band shirts is an ongoing issue. For Young, though, these obstacles underscore the stakes. In his view, merch is not only about revenue diversification but also about cementing culture through everyday objects that can transform passive listeners into active community members. Merch — and Bravado's products — are both commerce and cultural currency. "This



Rhenna, a Rihanna collectible action figure.



KISS with fans during a VIP experience on the band's 2023 End of the Road Tour.



Eilish with some of her merchandise at the Billie Eilish x American Express Hit Me Hard and Soft Pop-up in Berlin in May.

isn't just what I listen to," Young says. "It's who I am."

How big is Bravado's business today?

Universal's earnings reports show that merchandise generated north of \$900 million last year. It's a substantial piece of UMG's overall revenue, and it means our side of the business gets attention at the highest levels.

You often describe merch as more than just souvenirs. What do you mean by that?

Music creates an emotion, and merch is the last tangible thing you can hold, wear or display that represents that feeling. A vinyl record — even for someone without a turntable — can be merch. A hoodie or a T-shirt is an identifier: It says, "This is who I am, this is the culture I belong to." That's more powerful than a simple transaction.

What does your job look like week to week?

It's a mix. We run teams in cities across the globe — New York, L.A., London, Berlin, Tokyo, Sydney, Madrid, Nashville. So there's operational management. But there's also signing new artists, pitching them ideas, collaborating with labels and making sure our products fit each fan base. We also spend a lot of time on sustainability: upcycling leftover inventory, using recycled materials and building new processes to reduce waste.

How does upcycling work?

We partner with a company called Hal-lotex. They take old tour stock — unsold shirts, tote bags, whatever — break down the fibers and respin them into new cotton. That gets turned into new blank [shirts] for fresh merch. Or maybe it's taking old tote bags and turning them into a blanket. It's about turning excess into opportunity and cutting down on the warehouse full of leftovers that used to define this business.

How do the economics of merch work for artists?

There are three main buckets: tour sales, online stores and retail. On tour, there's usually a truck following the band with inventory, and most of that money goes directly to the artist on a net-split basis. Online and retail work more like a royalty system since we handle production and logistics. Across the board, the splits are heavily in the artist's favor — often 80% to 90% after costs. It's often the No. 2 source of revenue [for artists] after ticket sales. It's not unusual for a major tour to transact hundreds of thousands of dollars in merch in a single night.

What makes for a successful merch strategy?

Culture. If a band has a lifestyle built around them, merch thrives. Look at Billie Eilish, who insists on sustainability and explains it to fans every night. Or Olivia Rodrigo, who wore her own merch onstage. When the artist truly believes in it, sales follow. It becomes part of their identity and their fans' identities.

What kinds of products are trending now beyond T-shirts and hoodies?

Exclusive vinyl colorways for tours, blankets for amphitheaters, memorabilia books like Olivia Rodrigo's, collectible action figures like we did for Rihanna, Slipknot's masks and jumpsuits. It's all about matching the lifestyle of the artist with the passion of the fan.

How do global challenges — tariffs, Brexit, supply chain issues — affect you?

They definitely add complexity. Brexit alone changed how we move goods in and out of Europe. Tariffs can impact pricing and margins. But we have logistics teams built to handle that. We try to be nimble and find ways to keep delivering.

What about risk? Not every product is going to be successful. How do you deal with demand uncertainty?

The key is smart inventory control. We measure sales every night on tour and adjust orders quickly so we don't get stuck with piles of leftovers. Years ago, I inherited a warehouse in Nashville that was literally two football fields wide full of unsold merch. That doesn't happen anymore. We recycle, upcycle and design smarter so we're not flooding the market. And when there is excess, we'll sometimes move it online for fans who couldn't get to the show.

How much do fashion trends dictate what you create?

A lot. Kids today don't want the same cuts we sold 10 years ago. Right now, shorter, wider shirts are in. A few years ago, it was skinny fits and super-thin fabrics. Hip-hop audiences might prefer heavyweight blanks, while pop audiences want pajamas or skirts. It's about curating for each fan base — answering their call rather than handing them a generic black T-shirt.

Do you work outside music, with comedians or podcasters?

Yes. We do VIP and merch for Kevin Hart, and we also work with Shane Gillis, who's one of the biggest comedians in the country right now. Comedy is different — comedians don't pile into vans for long tours; they fly in for weekends. But they have catchphrases and bits that translate perfectly to merch. We also work with YouTubers and media personalities if it makes sense for our demographic.

Do macroeconomic shifts — inflation, politics, consumer confidence — affect your numbers?

On tour, not really. Since COVID, merch numbers have been the highest we've ever seen. People are celebrating being back in shows and merch is part of that. At retail, yes, you see

MGK in a shirt he collaborated on with his hometown football team, the Cleveland Browns.



slowdowns when inflation hits or tariffs drive up prices. But live is resilient. People are buying hoodies, vinyl and collectibles as part of the celebration of going to a concert.

Bootleggers have been around forever. Are they still a problem?

Always. If you're buying from a guy in the parking lot, it's not legit. And while the shirts might be cheap, they fall apart. But there's also a fascinating subculture of vintage band tees. Original Nirvana or Nine Inch Nails shirts from the '90s can sell for thousands of dollars today. That market is booming, and in some ways, it fuels demand for new designs, too.

Looking ahead, where's the growth?

Digital. We're learning as we go in video games and online platforms — it's still the Wild West. There's also a fight against online piracy, with fake ads on Instagram and Facebook. Beyond that, it's about converting casual fans into superfans with unique, culturally relevant products. At the end of the day, it's about making sure fans feel closer to their favorite artists.



Baird (center) at the Boys & Girls Club in Bell Gardens, Calif., in 2024, as part of her volunteer work for Support + Feed.



From left: Baird, FINNEAS and Eilish at a Support + Feed fall fundraiser in 2023.

THE ANTIDOTE TO DESPAIR

Maggie Baird has helped her star children, Billie Eilish and FINNEAS, prioritize sustainability in their touring careers — pushing the broader music industry forward in the process

BY KATIE BAIN

IT'S THE TAIL END of September's Climate Week: NYC when Maggie Baird gets on Zoom from her hotel in the city, ceramic mug of tea in hand.

The mother of Billie Eilish and FINNEAS, as well as a staunch activist for sustainability and plant-based food access, Baird calls her time at Climate Week a "mixed bag of emotions": She has participated in troubling events addressing the grim effects of climate change, but has also learned about the more hopeful work that's happening around the world to address it.

"It's a very dark time and there's a lot going on," she says. "Climate change is a threat multiplier. Every single other issue you care about, climate is there making it worse."

But Baird, who quotes Joan Baez's famous "Action is the antidote to despair" declaration, has been a force during the event. Support + Feed, the organization she founded in 2020 that provides hot, plant-based meals to people in need, distributed roughly 2,500 of these meals, along with pantry items, across New York. She and representatives from the nonprofit used this time in the community to talk about plant-based diets as crucial mechanisms of positive environmental impact, with the week's efforts also connecting various community organizations with climate thought leaders. The week ended with a Support + Feed "friend-raiser" event that hosted climate activists, community members and celebrities like Martha Stewart and Eilish, who turned out to support her mother.

"The main thing I would say about this time is that it's a moment for radical collaboration," Baird says. "Every organization I know and work with, we're just like, 'How can we be better together?' We have to multiply — exponentially."

For Baird, however, every week is Climate Week. Having worked with her children and their respective teams to meaningfully integrate sustainability into their careers, she's essentially a frontline reporter on sustainability within the music industry.

One sector where she's seeing "really exciting advances" is merchandise. Baird is a

longtime collaborator with Bravado, the merchandising and branding division of Universal Music Group that recently sent 400,000 obsolete and unsold tour T-shirts and other unused items by ship from Nashville to Morocco, where they were repurposed into new yarn by sustainability-focused textile manufacturer Hallotex. The yarn will be used to make new items in Europe to avoid the emissions of shipping them back.

For Eilish's merch, the Bravado team has successfully collaborated with upcycling and sustainability-focused clothing companies Rewilder and Suay and designer Iris Alonzo, the co-founder of the EverybodyWorld brand. Suay, for example, took hundreds of dead-stock work shirts, added sleeves and embroidered "Billie" on each piece, while some of Eilish's old merch was repurposed into bags. "The upcycled items sold out so fast," Baird says, "because there were limited quantities and they were extremely unique, and unique to Billie."

Meanwhile, a program developed by Eilish's Live Nation touring team, Support + Feed and Reverb, the long-standing nonprofit focused on music industry sustainability, now requires that any venue hosting an Eilish show must sell at least three plant-based main courses — and some venues have even gone entirely plant-based for Eilish. (Her sold-out *Hit Me Hard and Soft* world tour began in fall 2024 and runs through November.) The team also hosts educational webinars for venue culinary staffers to educate them about plant-based eating.

"It's about trying to help them understand that the arena has an obligation to clientele, to planet and to cost," Baird says. "It's all done in a friendly, helpful way. We're very welcoming and excited that they're willing to even take the call, frankly." The goal is for venues to maintain more robust plant-based approaches long after Eilish leaves. "It's really about helping people understand that you're not just serving your customer better while being better for the planet," Baird explains, "but that you can actually save money." These savings are achieved by reducing reliance on meat and incorporating more dishes made with lower-cost ingredients like beans, lentils, grains, fruits and vegetables; meals built around whole-food ingredients are often significantly more affordable to produce.

She is aware that implementing such programs takes resources. Eilish has helped fund Support + Feed and Reverb to be on-site at shows by rising artists who don't yet have the funds to host these groups themselves. "I think it's important that we reach down," Baird says. Fans can also buy more expensive "changemaker" tickets for Eilish's shows, with 50% of the revenue from each tagged for sustainability projects. One dollar of every regular ticket sold is also donated.

While Eilish is among the most visible musicians promoting sustainability in the industry, Baird's hope is that even if artists don't want to publicly discuss their efforts, "they'll still just do it. They don't have to make it as outward as what we're doing, but they can just do it as a given."

All these initiatives are happening in a year when Support + Feed has responded to a host of disasters. It fed locals in Los Angeles following the devastating California wildfires in January and in Tennessee after intense flooding in April. (Baird notes that in the wake of such events, Support + Feed representatives stay on the ground long after many other response organizations move on to the next crisis.) The communities Support + Feed serves have also been "very impacted" by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, "so we've had to really be nimble in how we feed people and how we convene," Baird says.

Still, the organization is expanding its offerings, now providing, in addition to hot meals, free produce from local farmers and cooking classes and recipe cards for people who may be unfamiliar with the produce they're receiving.

"We're really increasing our education and our outreach as much as possible," Baird says, "but also just feeding, feeding, feeding, feeding, feeding. The need now is tremendous with all the food programs being cut."

"It's a very intense time," she continues, "but there are so many people doing great things."



Baird and Paramore's Hayley Williams delivered meals in 2023 on behalf of Support + Feed.

VENUES

VENUE GROUPS

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN ENTERTAINMENT

James Dolan

Executive chairman/CEO; executive chairman/CEO, Sphere Entertainment

Jennifer Koester

President/COO, Sphere, Sphere Entertainment

James J. Claffey Jr.

Executive vp, venue management

Josephine Vaccarello

Executive vp, live

OAK VIEW GROUP

Gary Hutchinson

Executive vp, global touring and content

Mark Shulman

Senior vp, programming

Scott Menefee

Vp, ticket operations, Seattle Kraken and Climate Pledge Arena

Jeff Nickler

GM, Moody Center; president, OVG Austin

Casey Sparks

Assistant GM, Moody Center; senior vp, OVG Austin

LEGENDS GLOBAL

Dan Levy

CEO

Chris Bray

President, Europe

venu HOLDING CORP.

JW Roth

Founder/chairman/CEO

HARRIS BLITZER SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Sean Saadeh

Chief programming officer/head of entertainment

AEG VENUES

Nick Spanpanato

COO, venues, AEG Presents

STADIUMS

sofi STADIUM AND HOLLYWOOD PARK

Christy Castillo Butcher

Senior vp, programming and booking

MARVEL STADIUM

Scott Fitzgerald

GM

SOLDIER FIELD

Tim LeFavour

GM

ACCOR STADIUM

Ben Raggatt

Group GM

METLIFE STADIUM

Ron VanDeVeen

President/CEO

The Weeknd at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, Calif., in June.



Coldplay rocked Allegiant Stadium in Paradise, Nev., on June 6.

15,001-PLUS CAPACITY

QUDOS BANK ARENA

Michael Cox
Deputy GM

KASEYA CENTER

Jarred Diamond
Executive vp/GM

STATE FARM ARENA

Trey Feazell
Executive vp of arena programming

BARCLAYS CENTER

Laurie Jacoby
Executive vp/chief entertainment officer, BSE Global

BRIDGESTONE ARENA

David Kells
Chief venues officer, Bridgestone Arena, F&M Bank Arena and Nashville Predators

THE O2

Steve Sayer
Senior vp/GM

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

Lee Zeidman
Former president

See story, page 72.

KIA FORUM AND INTUIT DOME

Gillian Zucker
CEO, Halo Sports & Entertainment; president of business operations, Los Angeles Clippers and Intuit Dome

Becky Colwell

GM, Kia Forum; vp of music and events, Intuit Dome

LEGENDS GLOBAL

Dan Levy

CEO

Chris Bray

President, Europe

Following its August 2024 acquisition of ASM Global, Legends officially relaunched this year as Legends Global, uniting two industry giants under one banner with a full suite of venue and live-event services. The company now manages over 450 venues worldwide, with services spanning design, development, operations and premium hospitality.

“In the past year, we’ve truly become one company with unmatched capabilities across the life cycle of venues and events,” says Dan Levy, CEO of Legends Global, whose clients include New Orleans’ Caesars Superdome and the University of Miami, both places where Legends recently expanded its partnerships.

Today, “the venue management space has evolved from being largely operational to becoming a true partner in the touring ecosystem,” Levy says. “We are leveraging data, digital marketing and premium experiences to better support artists, managers and promoters, always ensuring our incentives are aligned.”

Looking ahead, Levy sees premium as the defining trend. “We can’t create enough levels of premium experiences,” he says. “We’ve been the clear leader in premium experience design and sales in sports for over a decade. Now we’re getting calls to help with entertainment, asking us to both help design and then market premium experiences in arenas, amphitheaters and for shows.”

The company’s slate includes the spring 2026 openings of the \$14 million Long Beach Amphitheater in California and Buffalo’s Highmark Stadium in New York, as well as streamlined routing for promoters through its expanding global network — making Legends a one-call solution for live events worldwide. —DAVE BROOKS

10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

DICKIES ARENA

Matt Homan
GM

3ARENA (DUBLIN)

Cormac Rennick
GM



CONGRATULATIONS DANNY WIMMER

BILLBOARD 2025 TOURING PLAYER

1 MILLION+ FESTIVAL TICKETS SOLD IN 2025

Rimes onstage at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in 2023.

THE UNSTOPPABLE AWARD LEANN RIMES

BY MELINDA NEWMAN

AFTER TOURING FOR 30 YEARS, LeAnn Rimes has learned a thing or two about maintaining her sanity on the road.

"Don't ever fly day of show. You can't do that anymore," she cautions. "Even if you're flying from Los Angeles to Oakland [Calif.], make sure you pack your outfit in your carry-on because your bag still may get fucking lost. And never do more than three shows in a row."

Rimes has been famous ever since an impossibly big voice came out of a wee girl when she appeared on *Star Search* in 1991, becoming a one-week champion at the age of 8. Five years later, she sounded preternaturally mature when Curb Records released her first single, "Blue," which garnered comparisons to Patsy Cline.

More than three decades into her career, the multiple Grammy winner, now 43, finds touring a richer experience than ever before, which has earned her the Unstoppable Award, to be presented at the Billboard Live Music Summit in Los Angeles on Nov. 3. "I love performing now more than I probably ever have because I feel like it's on my terms," she says. "I create this show that I want to perform, and I invite people into this space."

That's a far cry from the early days when she

moved at a much swifter pace, playing more than 500 shows over three-and-a-half years from ages 13 to 16. "No one really knew how long this was going to last," she recalls. "And it was that frame of mind of, 'Get it while you can.' Then when we were done, people were like, 'This may actually last and we just killed her!'"

For decades she continued touring at a less punishing rate but never took off more than six months out of the year. "It wasn't until COVID till I ever sat my ass in one place for that long," Rimes says, adding that the pandemic renewed her appreciation for performing. "These last several years, I've really thought long and hard about what I want to be putting out in the world, and it's important to me to hopefully bring [the audience] some joy when people come to the shows."

For Rimes, who now aims to play around 60 shows a year, touring remains "a huge part of my income. God knows the music business sucks. This is how we make money as artists." Along the way, the live veteran has adapted to modern touring — namely, the advent of social media. "It's just wild to see how much it's changed," says Rimes, who now looks out at a sea of cellphones rather than people's faces every night. "It could easily control you. I don't think about it too much anymore. I try to just allow

it to be what it is because it's its own beast."

But as she experienced this summer, she can't control everything onstage. During a show in Bow, Wash., in June, her front dental bridge fell out as she was singing "One Way Ticket." She ran offstage, adjusted it and rejoined her band. The moment was, of course, captured on video and went viral. Months later, she calls the incident "pretty fucking funny," laughing as she relives it. "I realized at that moment I could either quit — I'm four songs in — which I thought I was going to have to unless I was able to hold [the bridge] in. But luckily, I was able to. I've pretty much had everything happen to me onstage that could possibly happen, and that was probably one of the most precarious situations I've ever been in. I was very proud of myself that I handled it like a pro."

After that incident and countless others, including tripping over sound monitors and even falling into the pit years ago, she has grown unflappable — and her shows remain potent. "LeAnn's remarkable voice, her deep artistry and her connection with an audience have all continued to strengthen and grow throughout her 30-year career," says Seth Malasky, her primary agent and senior vp at Wasserman, which books her in North America. "Her shows feel timeless yet brand-new. She's earned her reputation as an authentic and captivating performer."

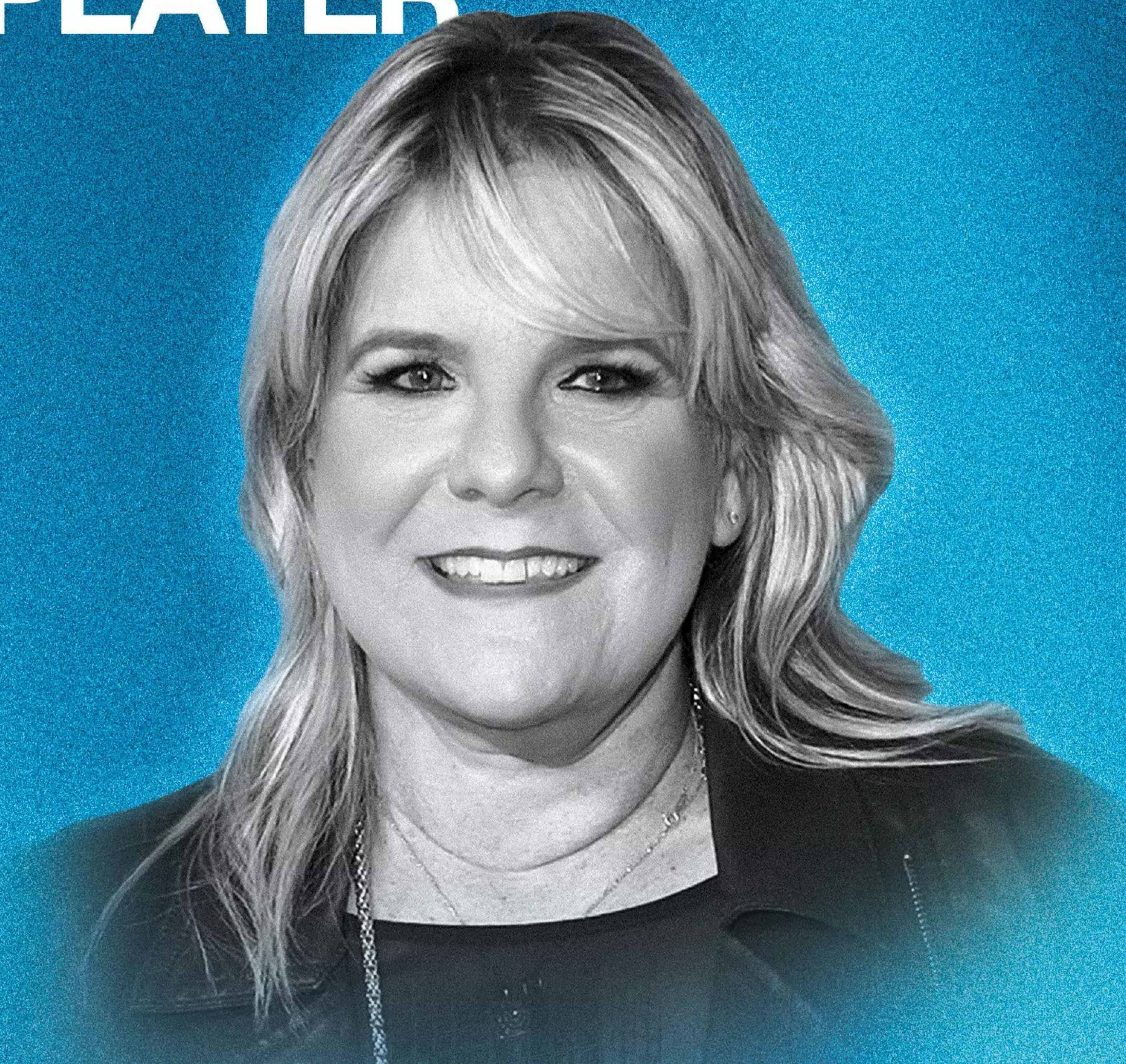
Still, Rimes has diversified her creative output. Over the past two years, other projects have limited her to about 30 performances annually; in 2024, she was a coach on *The Voice Australia* and *The Voice UK*, and this year, she's shooting ABC's 9-1-1: *Nashville*, in which she plays the villainous, jaded backup singer Dixie.

"It's been insane," she says of trying to schedule live dates around her often shifting filming schedule. She was initially wary of signing on to the Ryan Murphy-created fire department procedural after watching her husband, actor Eddie Cibrian, deal with the vagaries of shooting an episodic TV series: "I have seen him go through not getting scripts until 24 hours before they're shooting. I won't say it's been easy — I think at one time we were juggling seven episodes [between us] — but I think we're getting to a point now where we're starting to kind of get a little bit more in a groove."

Looking ahead, next year marks the 30th anniversary of Rimes' album *Blue*, which reached No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Top Country Albums chart in 1996 — and celebratory plans include a potential tour. "It is in the works," Rimes says. "I know everybody's so into nostalgia right now, which I'm loving. It's really funny to revisit that record because I was so little. There's about seven songs on it that I still really love that I would play." Among all her hits, including "How Do I Live" and "Can't Fight the Moonlight," she says she never tires of singing the album's title track. "There are just songs that melodically, lyrically, they're never going to go out of style," she says. "'Blue' is probably the one that will forever just be a classic."

As she plots that potential *Blue* tour and other future outings, she's confident — and can find humor in the unexpected. "Pretty much nothing embarrasses me onstage," she says. "I don't even know if my pants falling down would embarrass me. I'd be like, 'Whatevs... you guys got more than you paid for today.'"

BILLBOARD 2025 TOURING POWER PLAYER



LAURIE JACOBY

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT &
CHIEF ENTERTAINMENT OFFICER
BROOKLYN SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT



BARCLAYS
CENTER

BARCLAYS CENTER

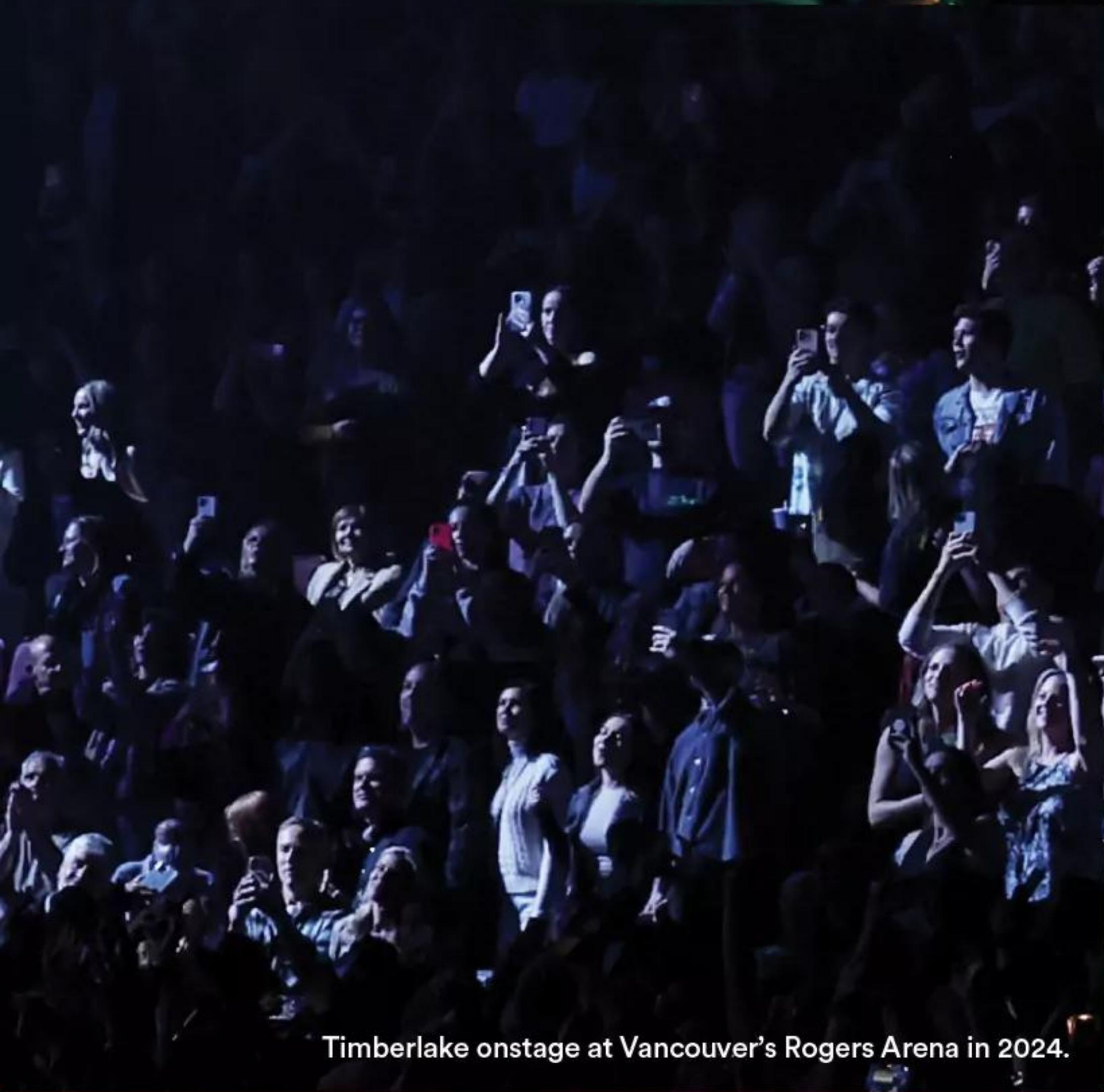


SCREEN TIME

Video technology has improved drastically and become more affordable —
and music's biggest stars are deploying it in eye-catching new ways

BY STEVE KNOPPER

Phish during its four-night run at Las Vegas' Sphere in 2024.



Timberlake onstage at Vancouver's Rogers Arena in 2024.

five-sided monolith, 17 feet by 30 feet by 7 feet, festooned with tiny LEDs for elaborate videos. At the end of every show, Timberlake surfed atop the giant rectangle, floating above the audience as it displayed gravity-defying bubbles on every side. "Screens have gotten infinitely lighter. They've gotten infinitely cheaper," says Halpin, founder and CEO of Silent House, a Los Angeles design and production company that has worked with Tyler, The Creator, P!nk, Doja Cat and others. "A lot of things came together to make the process easier and more achievable."

No longer are video screens confined to the giant postage stamps bookending every live stage. Because LED technology has rapidly advanced over the last 30 years, artists can display more detailed scenes bounded only by their imaginations, spread across screens of all shapes and sizes, for audiences. SZA sits on a ledge, silhouetted beneath a moon, clouds and stars that seem like a real night. Phish jam at Las Vegas' Sphere amid psychedelic canvases ranging from the ocean floor to the cosmos to abstract patterns. And some concerts employ the fast-growing technology to simply magnify the fans in attendance, like that infamously canoodling couple caught on a circular stadium kiss cam in July at a Coldplay show.

"The quality of LED in terms of image projection is insane these days," says Adrian Martinez, co-founder and creative director of STURDY, which has designed visuals for such stars as Bad Bunny, Kendrick Lamar and Drake. "We're getting to the point of watching HDTV."

Coldplay's *Music of the Spheres* tour, which broke worldwide attendance records in January with two concerts in India, anchors its stage with huge screens — circular ones on either side of the performance as well as a half-circle constantly running behind the band. It's no wonder that amid the nonstop larger-than-life video stream of frontman Chris Martin, neon rainbows

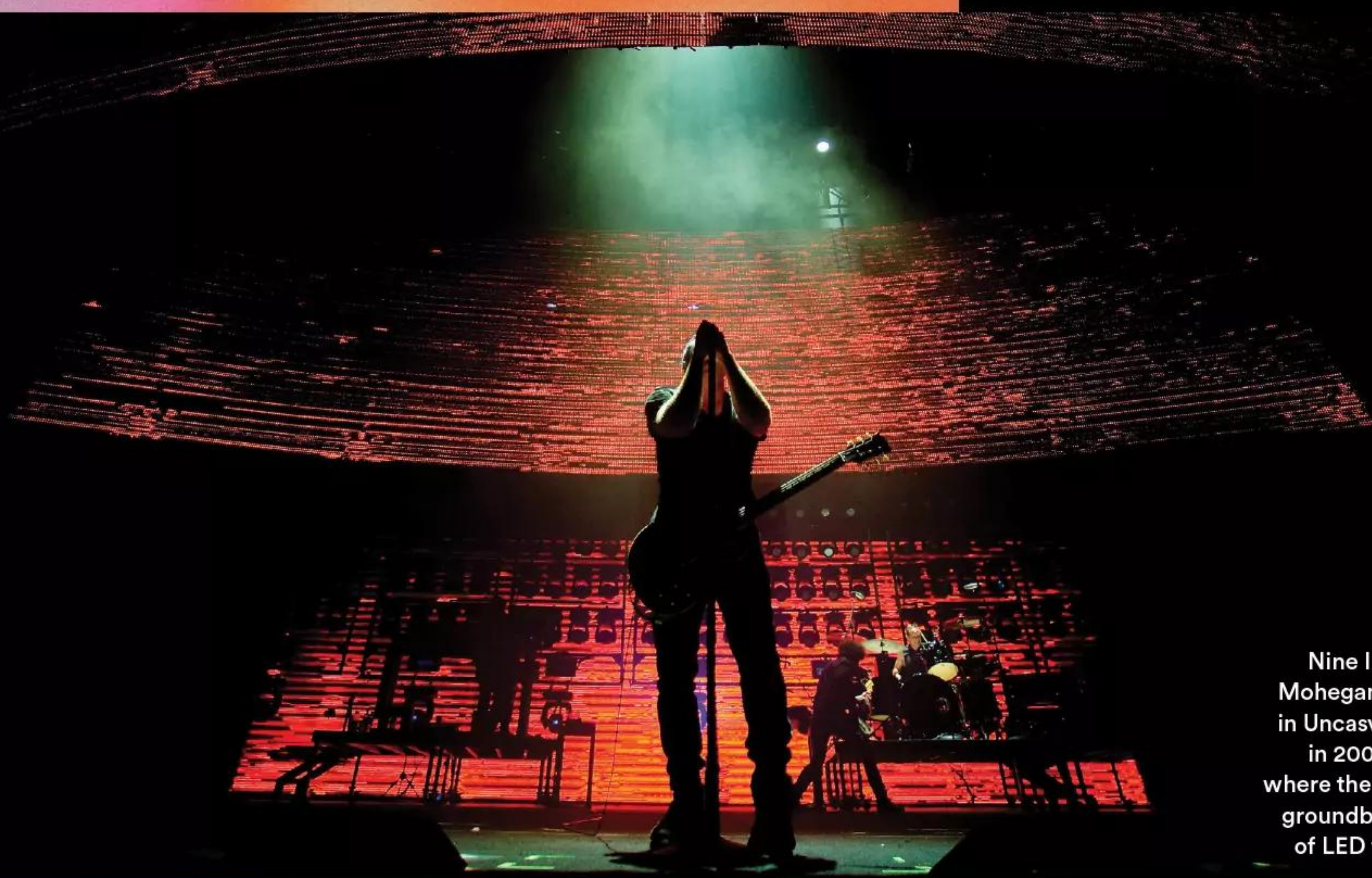
and explosions of light that the unwitting couple found themselves on the kiss cam.

"Privacy is a big issue, but we've always looked into, 'How can we get the audience to actually be part of the show?'" says Joris Corthout, CEO of Prismax, a visual production company that recently worked with promoters Insomniac and Tomorrowland to create the EDM show UNITY at Sphere. Prismax is developing an on-site concert photo booth that transfers fans' snapshots (with their permission, of course) to a huge stage combining lights and Polaroids. According to Silent House Studios president Alex Reardon, camera technology has improved to "pick up people in lower-light scenarios than [it] used to," which helps artists integrate fans into the video aspect of the show. Silent House client Maroon 5 plans to do the same for its upcoming tour, "capturing the audience and trying to use those images as something emotional, something musical," Halpin adds. "Think of it as another paint in the paint box."

Video technology for today's concerts is basically limitless, thanks in part to groundbreaking tours like Nine Inch Nails' 2008 outing *Lights in the Sky*, which spread tapestries of striking LEDs throughout all sides of the stage and ceiling, sometimes in the form of brightly colored grids or swirling mist. "LED in 2008 was very rare," says Daniel Jean, producer/director of the music department for Moment Factory, which designed that tour. "It was more expensive and it was low resolution." Ten years later, Childish Gambino's *Pharos* concerts in New Zealand were among the first to present an elaborate animated world, toggling between fish, burning trees, colorful coral shapes and industrial sculptures. "I likened it to a planetarium," says Christian Coffey, tour director for those shows and others by Lamar, A\$AP Rocky and more. "The band is performing, but you're watching the screen for so much of it." In

WHEN BAZ HALPIN first spoke with Justin Timberlake to plan the star's *Forget Tomorrow World Tour*, the concert production designer suggested: "Let's talk broadly about concepts and what you want to say on the tour." Timberlake cut him off. "No," he said. "I want to understand lighting, special effects, pyro, video. I want you to tell me everything that's new."

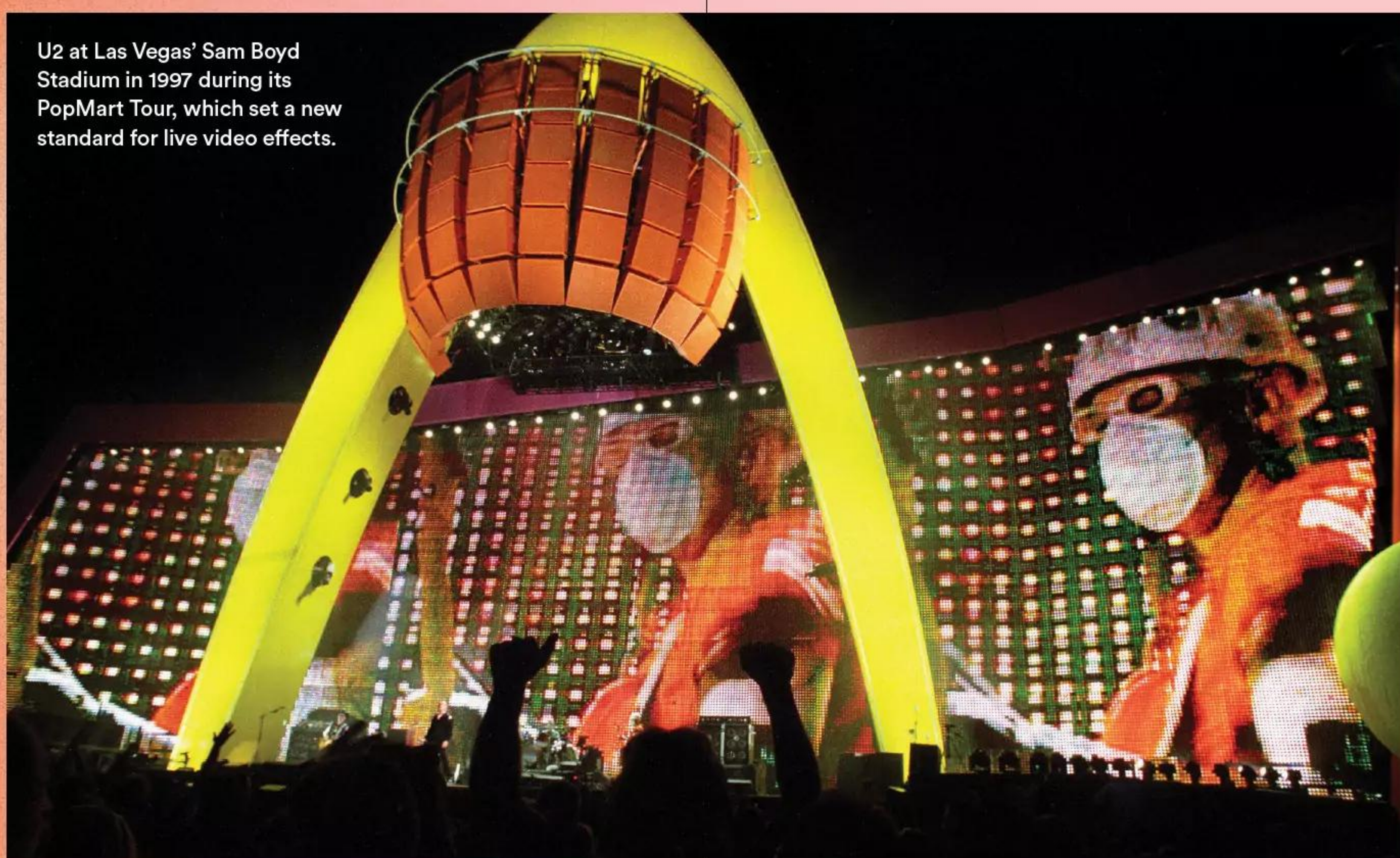
Halpin compiled a 100-page deck, including links to the latest video technology, for the pop superstar to study. Together, they concocted the centerpiece of the 14-month tour, which concluded in July — a massive,



Nine Inch Nails at Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Conn., in 2008, on a tour where the band made groundbreaking use of LED technology.

“Screens have gotten infinitely lighter. They’ve gotten infinitely cheaper. A lot of things came together to make the process easier and more achievable.”

**—BAZ HALPIN,
SILENT HOUSE**



U2 at Las Vegas’ Sam Boyd Stadium in 1997 during its PopMart Tour, which set a new standard for live video effects.

2024, multiple suspended screens displayed flickering lights and images of Billie Eilish singing throughout her video-heavy *Hit Me Hard and Soft* tour.

It was in 1997, while watching colorful LEDs flash behind U2 during Las Vegas dress rehearsals for the band’s seminal PopMart stadium tour, that special-effects whiz Frederic Opsomer turned to his wife and said, “You are now looking at the future for the rest of my career.” According to Opsomer, CEO of the 30-year-old production company PRG, PopMart was when concerts first took advantage of the blue LED, invented by Japanese engineers in 1993. Enabling use of every color rather than just red and green, the development kicked off the LED era in lighting and video, replacing Jumbotrons using heavy and expensive cathode-ray technology.

By the time PopMart rolled around, Opsomer adds, video equipment that historically required 14 touring trucks needed two. And installation time took two hours rather than two days. “Suddenly, all the possibilities are open,” he says. “We’ve been playing with it ever since.”

In addition to unlocking limitless shapes, sizes and images at concerts and festivals, state-of-the-art camera and LED technology has let production experts be more nimble and improvise along with the artists. For its four-night 2024 run at Sphere, Phish hired producers at Moment Factory, which also works with stars like Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo, to “play the visuals in real

time,” as Jean puts it; in one widely shared moment, an intricate, rainbow-colored forest transformed into fireworks exploding above the stage. “We’re playing miniature video games,” adds Manuel Galarneau, the company’s multimedia director. “Depending where we were at in the music, we could have trees grow, turn into fireworks.”

As video technology has expanded, production companies have boomed alongside it. High Scream, which puts on large events starring David Guetta and DJ Snake, among others, has increased its employees from two in 2012 to 240 today. “We went very, very big for the last five, six years,” says Romain Pissenem, the company’s founder and show producer. “It’s a lot of work, not a lot of sleep.” Moment Factory launched with six workers in 2001 and employs 480 today.

A crucial period for some concert video specialists was the coronavirus pandemic, when they could stop focusing on the day-to-day grind of setting up shows and contemplate innovation. Corthout pivoted to virtual festivals, including a digital iteration of Tomorrowland, and when traditional live events returned, “We just decided to work on that methodology we created for the virtual festivals,” he says. “We used to be [video DJs] and mix video files, but now we build a whole world.” Artificial intelligence, Corthout adds, has been a “fantastic tool” that reduces production costs.

Almost every video designer refers to some aspect of world-building. For this year’s Grand National stadium tour co-starring Lamar and SZA, the rapper’s world was “street and concrete and very raw,” according to tour director Coffey, while the R&B star’s landscape was “very lush.” The challenge, he says, was to use screens and high-resolution video content to “transport one world to another and make it seem seamless so it’s not jarring.” Corthout adds: “That’s the future of live entertainment — you can transport people to a completely different world.”

With all the fantastical potential, for many in the touring business, one risk is overstimulating the audience. “The resolution and the processing have gotten better,” says LeRoy Bennett, the longtime concert production designer currently working on Paul McCartney’s tour, in which the singer duets seamlessly with his late Beatles partner John Lennon on “I’ve Got a Feeling,” with assistance from documentary director Peter Jackson. “But we’ve got 30 songs in the show, so there’s not all content all the time. We try to give it a break. It becomes redundant if every single song has video on it.” Shows at Sphere, Bennett adds, are perfect for EDM artists who don’t necessarily need the audience to look at *them*, whereas pop and rock stars want to avoid “the whole audience looking up at the ceiling and not looking at you.”

Still, Sphere lets designers innovate in ways they can’t on traditional tours. “Sphere allows us to immerse people 100% as far as the eye can see,” Corthout says. “An old stage would give you physical boundaries. Sphere takes those boundaries away.”

Sphere productions like UNITY use innovative ideas that point the way for others to follow. “I haven’t personally worked with an artist who has said, ‘Look what Sphere is doing, I want to do that,’” Coffey says. “But Sphere is pushing the envelope forward.” In this way, according to Martinez, Sphere productions offer “proof of concept” for experimenting with video ideas. “The bar has been set so high,” he says, “it has opened the door for those of us on the creative side to say, ‘We know this works. How about we try this?’”

HBSE
CONGRATULATES



SEAN SAADEH

billboard

2025 TOURING POWER PLAYERS LIST

NW
NORTHWEST
STADIUM



Prudential Center

LOEW'S JERSEY
THEATRE



5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

RED ROCKS AMPHITHEATRE

Tad Bowman

Venue manager, Red Rocks Amphitheatre and Denver Coliseum

DOLBY LIVE

Tyler Dowdle

GM

SSE ARENA

Paul McMahon

CEO, The Odyssey Trust

2,500-5,000 CAPACITY

THE COLOSSEUM AT CAESARS PALACE

Terrence O'Donnell

Senior vp/GM

FOX THEATRE

Allan Vella

President/CEO

UNDER 2,500 CAPACITY

FIRST AVENUE

Dayna Frank

Owner/CEO, First Avenue Productions; founding board president/advocacy committee chair, National Independent Venue Association



Zeidman (left) and Kane Brown at Los Angeles' Crypto.com Arena in 2021.

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

Lee Zeidman

Former president

After nearly three decades and more than 6,500 events, Lee Zeidman — the long-time president of Crypto.com Arena, Peacock Theatre and L.A. LIVE — stepped down from his post earlier this year. Zeidman, who took over the venue then known as Staples Center before its 1999 opening, helped shape Downtown Los Angeles into one of the world's most influential sports and entertainment districts. "There wasn't much left to prove," says Zeidman, 70, of his decision to move on. "I wanted to leave on my own terms, healthy and ready for the next chapter."

What moments stand out from your time at Crypto.com Arena?

Hosting seven NBA Finals where the home team won five. Two Stanley Cup Finals where the Kings took home both championships. Twenty-two Grammy Awards [ceremonies], five All-Star Games across the NBA and the NHL, and memorials for Michael Jackson, Kobe Bryant, Nipsey Hussle, Dr. Jerry Buss and Chick Hearn. And building Staples Center in 18 months, from shovel to opening night with Bruce Springsteen. That's unheard of.

How has the business evolved since Staples Center opened?

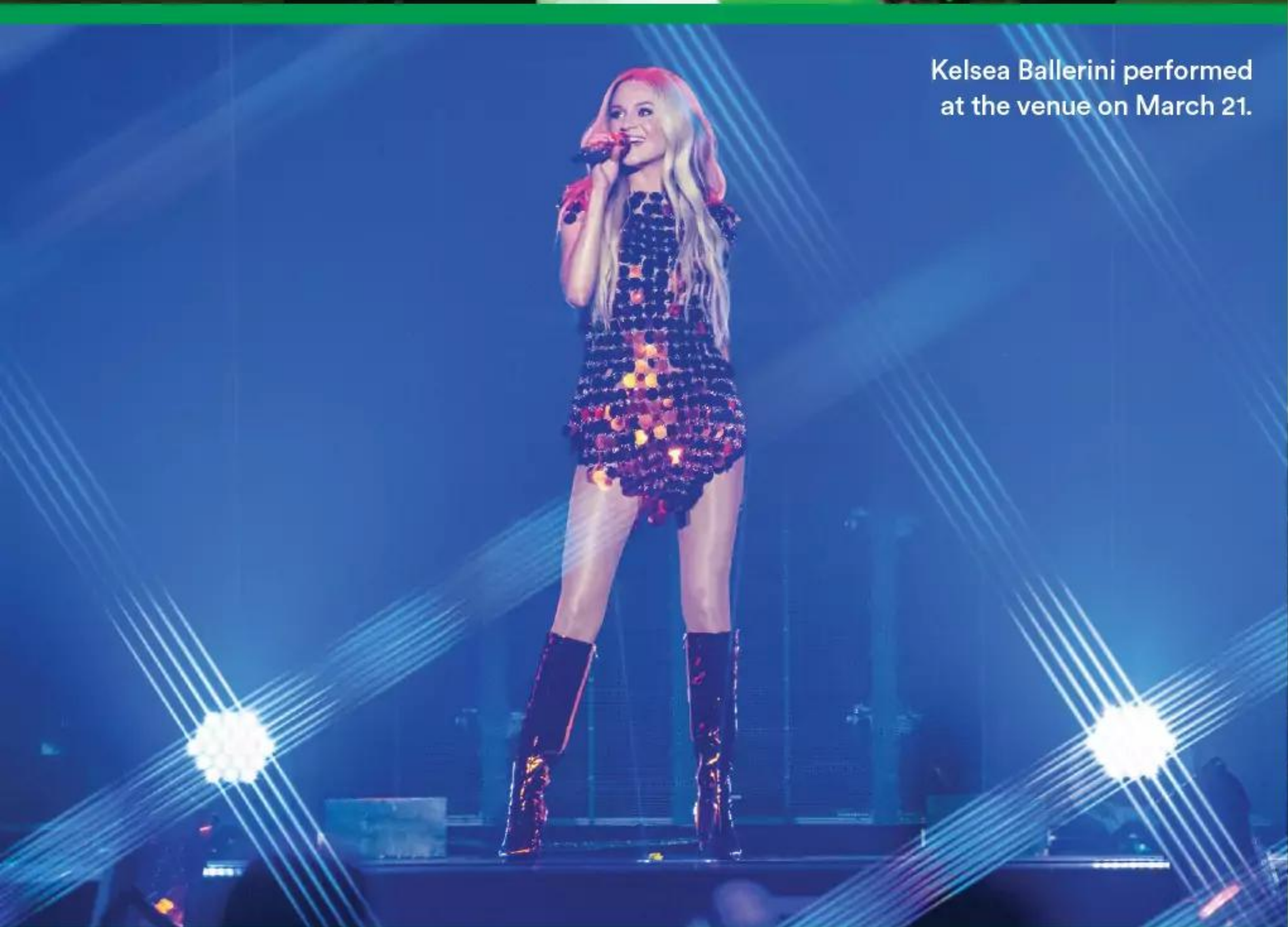
Ticketing and competition. When we opened, we were a "must-play" venue. Now there are four major arenas in Southern California, plus eight stadiums within 20 miles. It's an extremely crowded market. It's become a jump-ball environment for shows.

At the arena, you pushed sustainability long before it was trendy.

We always tried to lead by example. In 2008, we installed solar panels on the roof with [former Gov. Arnold] Schwarzenegger. In 2015, we partnered with [former



YoungBoy Never Broke Again onstage at the arena on Sept. 9.



Kelsea Ballerini performed at the venue on March 21.

Vice President] Al Gore and Bloom Energy on fuel cells to offset power from [the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power]. More recently, we eliminated plastic cups through a partnership with rWorld and started donating leftover food to the Midnight Mission. Sustainability was never about headlines; it was about responsibility.

L.A. will host the 2028 Summer Olympics. How do you see that playing out?

The Olympics will activate every venue in Southern California, but coordination will be complicated. Still, it's an incredible opportunity for the region. Crypto.com Arena, Intuit Dome and OC Vibe will all play major roles.

What do you hope your legacy is?

That we ran these venues with integrity, honesty and transparency. That we revitalized Downtown L.A. and set a standard for how arenas can serve their communities — from sustainability to safety to fan experience. And that my team — many of whom stayed with me for more than 20 years — felt valued and empowered.

Will you remain involved in the industry?

Absolutely. I'll always be available to consult, join advisory boards or just offer an opinion. I'm not chasing work, but I've spent 45 years in this business — you don't just turn that off.

—D.B.

YOUNGBOY: ARIEL GOLDBERG/CRYPTO.COM ARENA; BALLERINI: JESSICA LEE/CRYPTO.COM ARENA

TICKETING

STUBHUB

Eric Baker

Founder/CEO

TIXR

Robert Davari

Founder/CEO

EVENTIM USA

Phil Lawrence

Senior vp/executive head of music

SEATED

David McKay

Co-founder/CEO

AXS

Bryan Perez

CEO

TICKETMASTER

Mark Yovich

Chairman

ASSOCIATIONS

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT TALENT ORGANIZATION

Nathaniel Marro

Executive director

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT VENUE ASSOCIATION

Stephen Parker

Executive director

METHODOLOGY

Billboard's Touring Power Players list recognizes executives driving the success of live music over the past year, solely among promoters, agencies, venues, ticketing companies and industry associations. Nominations for all of *Billboard's* industry-sourced executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a submission link is sent by request before the nomination period. (Email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and for how to obtain an editorial calendar.) *Billboard's* 2025 Touring Power Players were nominated by their firms and chosen by editors based on factors including their company's impact on consumer behavior, as measured by *Billboard* Boxscore charts for the 12 months ending May 31. Career trajectory and momentum were also considered.

billboard

2025 TOURING POWER PLAYERS LIST



CONGRATULATIONS BETH KEITH



CONGRATULATIONS TO EVERYONE AT TBA ON A
WONDERFUL FIVE YEARS. A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO ALL OF
OUR CLIENTS WHO STARTED THIS JOURNEY WITH US AND
TO THOSE WHO HAVE JOINED US ALONG THE WAY.

WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT THE NEXT FIVE YEARS HOLD!



PLANNING WHAT'S NEXT

billboard

2025 TOURING POWER PLAYER

Congratulations

Robert Davari

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CONGRATULATIONS DIETER SEMMELMANN

ON BEING NAMED A BILLBOARD POWER PLAYER!

YOUR TEAM AT  **Simmel
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1. **BILLBOARD**
2. **ISSN 0056-1000**
3. **Filing date:** 10/01/25
4. **Issue frequency:** 19 regular issues (two in January, March, May, June, August and December; one in February, April, July and November; three in October)
5. **Number of issues published annually:** 19
6. **The annual subscription price is \$299**
7. **Complete mailing address of known office of publication:** Billboard Media LLC, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017. **Contact person:** Mike Petre. **Telephone:** 323-617-9261
8. **Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher:** Billboard Media LLC, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017
9. **Full names and complete mailing addresses of publisher, editor and managing editor:** Publisher, Mike Van, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017; Editor, Hannah Karp, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017; Managing Editor, Christine Werthman, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017
10. **Owner:** P-MRC Holdings LLC, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017
11. **Known bondholders, mortgages and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent of more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities:** None
12. **Tax status:**
13. **Publisher title:** Billboard
14. **Issue date for circulation data below:** 8/30/25.
15. **The extent and nature of circulation:**

	Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months:	Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date:
A. Total number of copies printed (net press run).	15,352	10,083
B. Paid/requested circulation.		
1. Mailed outside-county paid subscriptions/requested.	10,637	8,907
2. Mailed in-county paid subscriptions/requested.	0	0
3. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales.	154	75
4. Requested copies distribution through other classes mailed through the USPS.	0	0
C. Total paid/requested distribution.	10,791	8,982
D. Nonrequested distribution (by mail and outside mail).		
1. Outside-county nonrequested copies.	1,787	28
2. In-county nonrequested copies.	0	0
3. Nonrequested copies mailed at other classes through the USPS.	0	0
4. Nonrequested copies distributed outside the mail.	2,443	848
E. Total Nonrequested distribution.	4,230	876
F. Total distribution (sum of 15c and 15e).	15,021	9,858
G. Copies not distributed.	331	225
H. Total (sum of 15f and 15g).	15,352	10,083
	Average percent of copies paid/requested for the preceding 12 months:	Actual percent of copies paid/requested for the preceding 12 months:
I. Percent paid.	71.84%	91.11%

16. Total circulation includes electronic copies: report circulation on PS Form 3526-X worksheet
17. Publication of statement of ownership for a requester publication will be printed in the 10/25/25 issue of the publication.
18. Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager or owner: Dave Roberson (SVP, Subscriptions). I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanction and civil actions.



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8

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MBA in Music Business

Bachelor of Arts in Commercial Music

Business, Production, Music for Media, General Studies in Commercial Music

Minor in Commercial Music

Minor in Music Business



players

CELEBRATING MUSIC'S MOVERS

Rogers in May.



2025 TOP MUSIC BUSINESS SCHOOLS

For over a decade, *Billboard* has highlighted the colleges and universities providing the next generation of executives — and artists — with the skills to achieve music industry success **BY CATHY APPLEFELD OLSON AND THOM DUFFY**

I HOPE YOU FEEL so proud, and I'm sure you might feel a little scared, too," said Maggie Rogers as she gave a wisdom-filled commencement address in May at Radio City Music Hall to New York University's Tisch School of the Arts class of 2025 — the school from which Rogers graduated in 2016.

"A lot of speakers might tell you that they remember how you feel," Rogers added. "But I was sitting where you were sitting just nine years ago, so when I tell you that, I promise that I mean it."

Nine years ago, Rogers also appeared in *Billboard* for the first time, on the opening page of the 2016 Top Music Business Schools list. She was shown in a photograph with Pharrell Williams, whose astounded reaction to her self-released track "Alaska" went viral on YouTube and ignited her career straight out of the Tisch School's Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music.

For more than a decade, *Billboard* has been spotlighting schools that are educating the next generation of music industry leaders, as well as the artists and produc-

ers who recognize the importance of the business skills that these schools teach.

Billboard chooses its top music business schools based on industry recommendations, alum information provided by honorees from our multiple power lists, years of reporting on educational options and information requested from the schools themselves. We invite selected schools to tell us what makes their program unique, to boast about accomplished alums and to describe specific courses, events and speakers. (This year, the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts claims the coolest campus visit, as LIPA founder Paul McCartney hosted Bruce Springsteen, who took part in an hourlong Q&A session with students in June.)

The schools here are not ranked; they are listed alphabetically. "Rankings have created an unhealthy obsession with selectivity," former U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in a 2023 speech. Despite moves to downsize the U.S. Department of Education, that federal agency still hosts a free, online college scorecard that provides quantitative information to complement the quali-

tative profiles on our list, including specific data on college costs, graduation rates, employment and student debt.

Regarding college costs and debt, *Billboard* has opted to emphasize more affordable public colleges and universities, which now make up one-third of this list. We also continue to recognize historically Black colleges and universities such as Howard University and Tennessee State University and to add schools from outside the music industry's capitals, such as the newly included University of Georgia in Athens.

What Rogers said she would have told her younger self upon graduating nine years ago certainly also applies to those now searching for schools to start their music careers — on or off the stage.

"I'd remind her that two artistic careers will never be the same and that numbers do not matter — what matters is how you make people feel," Rogers said. "I'd tell her that the people you do this with — and how you define what it means to live a beautiful life — matter more than anything. The world is waiting for you and all of the beautiful things you will create."

Abbey Road Institute

London

The Abbey Road Institute offers its students an intensive music production and sound engineering diploma, which, as closely as possible, replicates the experience of working in the music and audio industry. The school prepares graduates to build their careers as professionals in music and pro audio. Its core program is the Advanced Diploma in Music Production and Sound Engineering, which includes an in-depth music business module that covers management, A&R, marketing, synch, licensing and much more. The new Dolby Atmos Mixing for Music course is taught by Grammy Award-winning engineer James Auwarter. More than 90% of graduates are in music- and audio-related work within six months of graduation. The institute now has affiliated programs worldwide and is on track to open campuses in Mumbai, India, and Los Angeles.

ALUM Producer-engineer-mixer Gil Portal at RAK Studios, whose credits include work with Disclosure, Coldplay, Shaznay Lewis, J Balvin, Usher and DJ Khaled.

American University

Washington, D.C.

Housed within American University's Kogod School of Business, the Business and Entertainment Program offers a core business background while students specialize in the entertainment industry with classes primarily taught by industry veterans. Kogod added a focus on artificial intelligence to every class this year, and many speakers at the fourth annual Artist Rights Symposium — including SAG-AFTRA general counsel Jeff Bennett — addressed topics surrounding AI and name, image and likeness rights. Each year, students head to New York and Los Angeles to visit business management firms, agencies and other entertainment companies. On campus, recent speakers include Lionsgate chairman/chief creative officer Kevin Beggs, Academy Award winner David Dinerstein and Kogod alums working at Live Nation, United Entertainment Group Worldwide, CAA and the three major music groups. Recent graduate placements include eight students hired at business management firm FBMM and 12 students hired at major agencies.

FACULTY New program director Linda Bloss-Baum also teaches a class where students attend SXSW and the National Independent Venue Association conference and help promote a showcase.

Auburn University

Auburn, Ala.

Auburn's Department of Music established a music business minor in 2023,



Sheeran (center) with students at Belmont University.

and the late-2024 completion of a state-of-the-art recording studio located within the Music Studies complex is the latest enhancement to the Music Studies Program, which offers courses taught by instructors with real-world experience. Students are introduced to all aspects of the music business, from labels and publishers to touring and concert promotion, with an emphasis on a global/entrepreneurial perspective. Speakers including Universal Music Publishing Nashville CEO Troy Tomlinson and former Warner Music Nashville A&R executive vp Scott Hendricks keep the conversation fresh. While the Music Business Program is relatively new, Auburn University grads include Apple CEO Tim Cook and executives working at companies such as WME, Sony, The Trenches Collective, Sun Records and Sweet Talk Publicity.

COURSE Record Company Procedures gives students the experience of working for a record company by forming a label, working with an artist from a designated artist pool and creating a marketing, sales and media plan all while staying within a designated budget.

Baldwin Wallace University

Berea, Ohio

Located just 15 minutes from Downtown Cleveland, Baldwin Wallace offers a bachelor of arts in music industry and, in 2021, was invited to become an educational affiliate of the Grammy Museum. Last fall, music industry students had the opportunity to attend the Disney+ live production of the induction ceremony at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame; in the spring, they traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with staff from NPR's *Tiny Desk*,

Live Nation and the RIAA. On campus, students this year were visited by NPR senior podcast operations specialist Darius Cook and Music Asset Management founder and CEO Mary Jo Mennella, and students also benefit from internship experiences with local partners including Blossom Music Center and Beachland Ballroom & Tavern.

COURSE Music Licensing and Placement, taught by music supervisor Joe O'Riordan, delves into practical elements of song placement for film, TV and commercials. O'Riordan has placed songs for projects such as MTV's *Ridiculousness* and Bravo's *Vanderpump Rules*.

Belmont University

**Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business
Nashville**

Belmont's Curb College this year is opening a 17,000-square-foot facility on Music Row to house songwriting rooms, listening spaces, live-sound classrooms and student lounges. The college offers internships, unique projects and A-list guest speakers. Case in point: Ed Sheeran spoke to a songwriting class in the spring, sharing new songs, critiquing student work and participating in a Q&A. And Kelsea Ballerini dropped in with producer Alysa Vanderveym, A&R lead Kelly Bolton and the songwriters she collaborated with on her album *Patterns*. Curb's program is enhanced by semester-long trips to New York and L.A. and leads to a bachelor of business administration. Alums include Songwriters Hall of Fame inductees Ashley Gorley and Hillary Lindsey, and John Zaring, co-founder of Results Global, whose clients include Dolly Parton, Megadeth and Trisha Yearwood.

COURSE Through a partnership with Dolly Parton; her management company, CTK Enterprises; and the team behind *Dolly: A True Original Musical*, Belmont this spring launched Dolly U, comprising four courses including Dolly Parton: Icon & Influence, which featured lectures and interviews with members of Parton's team and even a surprise conversation with Lainey Wilson.

Berklee College of Music

Boston

Berklee offers two options for students interested in careers in the music business: its long-standing bachelor of music in music business, where students focus on the management, marketing or entrepreneurial aspects of the industry while simultaneously perfecting their musical craft, and a bachelor of arts program in music industry leadership and innovation, designed for aspiring business professionals in the creative industries who have an interest in music, technology and innovation. Both programs offer guest speakers, industry partnerships and events, including the inaugural TEDx-Berklee Boston featuring a TEDx Talk by CD Baby president Molly Neuman, which took place last fall. The Berklee Popular Music Institute's flagship program, BPMI Live, offers a yearlong experience in which students scout, develop and tour with emerging artists at the industry's largest music festivals. This spring, students traveled to the United Kingdom with the band Park National.

EVENT During "A Day With Lucius," the Grammy-nominated band, whose members are Berklee alums, met with students to share stories, insights and advice.

Berklee College of Music

Valencia Campus
Valencia, Spain

The master of arts in global entertainment and music business offered by Berklee College of Music on its campus in Valencia, Spain, helps graduate-level students gain a competitive advantage in the music industry. It offers networking and experiential learning opportunities and an elective-based curriculum that empowers students to curate their own learning experience. All courses are grounded in the realities of the music industry, encouraging students to design solutions for current business challenges. The program has welcomed more than 50 high-level industry guest speakers, such as Yvette Noel-Schure, founder of Schure Media Group and publicist for Beyoncé, and Marie-Anne Robert, head of Sony Music France. The annual Berklee Global Career Summit focuses on professional development and career paths through a series of keynotes, panels, workshops and mentoring sessions that provide practical knowledge to support professional development, mainly in the areas of business, film scoring, production and songwriting.

COURSE Active music supervisors mentor students in the Publishing and Music Supervision course, in collaboration with

the Spanish Speaking Music Supervision Association. Students work alongside 14 experts who guide mentees through projects and industry practices.

BIMM University

BIMM Music Institute
London

The goal of the BIMM Music Institute is to immerse students in the heart of the music industry from day one of their education. The school's curriculum for nonperforming professionals includes experience in areas like artist management, marketing, event promotion, A&R and music publishing, working directly on projects alongside industry experts. The institute has the unique advantage of affiliated campuses in cities with vibrant music scenes, including Manchester, England; Dublin; and Berlin. It also offers students a strong network of tutors, visiting professionals and alums who help graduates build their careers. The institute hosted the SXSW London Roadshow Tour, presenting numerous speakers at three locations in June. Alums include Iona Rodger, a graduate of BIMM Manchester, who gained an internship at Sony Music and subsequently a position doing creative marketing for indie label Music for Nations.

SPEAKERS Miles Leonard of Parlophone and

Warner Music, James Threlfall of BBC Music Introducing, Emma Hardie of Aardman Studios and Alyx Holcombe of BBC Radio 1.

The BRIT School

Croydon, England

The British Record Industry Trust (the charitable division of U.K. labels trade group BPI that presents the BRIT Awards) partnered with the British government in 1991 to create The BRIT School to offer a tuition-free education for students ages 14 to 19 for careers in performance and creative arts and related industries. Nearly 35 years later, the school thrives with a music and arts specialist vocational curriculum taught by industry professionals skilled in live sound, production, recording, music tech and business. The school has unparalleled connections within the music industry to offer students work experience. It has two venues on-site, including The Obie Theater (recognized with the PRS Music Heritage Award in 2022), and houses the Sir George Martin Recording Studio and the YouTube Music Studio for live TV broadcast and radio. BRIT School alums include Adele, RAYE and Lola Young.

SPEAKERS Billy Bragg, Ezra Collective and Kate Nash are among those who have offered their perspectives on the music industry.

California Institute of the Arts

Herb Alpert School of Music
Valencia, Calif.

At CalArts' Herb Alpert School of Music, all students — even those who intend to pursue nonperforming roles after graduation — engage in creating, producing or otherwise developing music. Laurel Halo, a composer, producer, live musician and DJ, recently joined the school's faculty. Weekly one-on-one lessons in production and studio-based composition in the school's recording and mixing studios are led by L.A.-area producers, such as Jake Viator at Stones Throw Studios and Sami Perez at Wiggle World Studios. Those producers often connect students with internships and job opportunities at studios, labels and venues. Courses tailored for nonperforming students include The Art of the Mix, which focuses on efficient workflow and effective decision-making in an era of self-production, and Interface Design, which details how to use sensors for human computer interface in creative projects.

ALUM Greg Kurstin, a nine-time Grammy-winning producer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, has worked with Adele, Beck, Sia, P!nk, Maren Morris, Paul McCartney, Foo Fighters and Kendrick Lamar, among others.

California State University, Northridge

Northridge, Calif.

CSUN's Music Industry Studies program offers a comprehensive curriculum designed to prepare students for diverse roles in the music industry. Based in Los Angeles, the program, which connects students with the professional world through internships, guest speakers and experiential learning, has graduated executives including Regard Music founder and CEO Sean O'Malley and entertainment company PERME8 founder Joe Willis. Courses include Music Industry Fundamentals, a class that extends over two semesters to provide a foundational understanding of contracts, publishing, royalties and professional pathways, and Digital Strategies for the Working Musician, focused on branding, content strategy, digital revenue and social media tools for entrepreneurial musicians. A signature component of the program is the student-run, faculty-advised label VoVe, where students manage artist development, marketing and live events. Rising L.A. acts including Sohpiethemoon, Cayden Corbett and aziboh have worked with VoVe.

EVENT For the WME Career Insights Panel, music agents Carly Huffman and Kidder Erdman joined CSUN faculty for a conversation.



Delta State University

**Delta Music Institute
Cleveland, Miss.**

Students ready to embrace technology, creativity and business strategy will find their muse at the university's Delta Music Institute program. Located in the famed region that gave birth to the blues, the institute provides a bachelor of science in entertainment industry studies along with experience in studio facilities that include a Dolby Atmos Immersive Audio Studio. Students also participate in real-world projects like live-event production and gain experience through partnerships with Grammy Museum Mississippi, GrammyU and lessons leading to an Avid Learning for Pro Tools Certification. This past year, Rick Sanjek, a former BMI and Atlantic Records executive and author of *American Popular Music and Its Business in the Digital Age*, came to campus, as did Paul Mathis, entertainment lawyer and legal counsel for Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductees The Spinners.

CLASS Entertainment Product Marketing explores online tools, emerging technologies and data analytics for marketing recorded products. Students will examine music industry structure, design marketing campaigns and develop brand strategies with a focus on digital distribution, social media and integrated promotion across platforms.

Drexel University

**Westphal College of Media Arts and Design
Philadelphia**

Students in Drexel's Music Industry Program begin business-focused coursework in their first year and build real-world skills through Mad Dragon Music Group, a practicum simulating a full-service music company. A six-month co-op is built into the curriculum, and this past year, students executed an album rollout for Brooklyn-based folk artist Gemma Laurence in collaboration with the e-commerce company Mainfactor. Drexel's proximity to New York enables students to visit the headquarters of prominent music industry companies and labels such as Warner Music and REPUBLIC Collective, where they gain insider access to leading executives and creatives. The program also hosts an active roster of speakers each year. Recent guests include Spotify's Chissy Nkemere Cherian; Major Seven, a producer for Jay-Z; and Sony/ATV's Omar Grant. Successful alumni, like Catherine Cahill, president/CEO of Philadelphia's Mann Center for the Performing Arts, are profiled in the student-run zine *Double Platinum*.

COURSES Artist Representation, taught by Recording Academy trustee Nikisha



Zac Brown Band's John Driskell Hopkins (center) is one of the current artists-in-residence at the Joel A. Katz Music and Entertainment Business Program at Kennesaw State University.

Bailey, and Streaming and Radio Promotion, led by WXPB Philadelphia's John Vettese, offer insight into the evolving music landscape.

Full Sail University

Winter Park, Fla.

Students enrolled in Full Sail University's bachelor of science music business program participate in a comprehensive curriculum that includes artist management, artist development, music copyright and publishing, music supervision, concert management, marketing, data analysis and distribution. For the course Concert Management and Touring, for example, students collaborate with peers in other classes such as Music Evaluation for A&R and Music Business Marketing to work on the planning, logistics, talent booking and marketing for a monthly networking event. Additionally, the Artist Development Initiative provides students with opportunities to gain experience by supporting working artists through real-world activities. The program offers frequent daylong workshops presented by business program faculty members in specific areas like AI, branding, social media strategy and live events. Executives from Udio, Revolt TV, SteeleSync, Walt Disney Animation Studios and Warner Chappell Music recently visited to speak with students.

ALUM Ziggy Chareton is senior vp/head of A&R for Island Records and co-manager of Shawn Mendes.

Hofstra University

Hempstead, N.Y.

Hofstra's music business curriculum is an interdisciplinary program that includes courses in content creation, radio, TV and film and elective concentrations in marketing, general business, pre-law and music technology; courses for the latter take place in its new state-of-the-art recording studio. Most music business students participate in at least four internships during their time at Hofstra, and the school's proximity to Manhattan, less than 30 miles to the west, provides

abundant opportunities at companies including Primary Wave, Columbia Records, Warner Chappell Music, Spotify and BMI. On campus, the curriculum is constantly evolving. In the spring, former Atlantic Records president of A&R Pete Ganbarg taught A&R in the Music Industry, a course for which students assembled pitches for Ganbarg's Pure Tone Records from artists they discovered online.

SPEAKER During the spring semester, WME head of music brand partnerships Shari Lewin led the three-part master-class series Brand Partnerships in Music, which included a visit to the company's New York office.

Howard University

**The Warner Music/Blavatnik Center for Music Business
Washington, D.C.**

The Warner Music/Blavatnik Center for Music Business at Howard University equips students with skills and experience for nonperforming careers in the music industry, with a focus on developing social justice leaders, industry trailblazers and global game-changers. Students have access to executives, resources and opportunities. During the last academic year, the program welcomed more than 50 executives and artists to campus, including Grammy winners Poo Bear and Ne-Yo. Executives including RIAA senior vp Tom Clees and *The Kelly Clarkson Show* talent booker Christopher McDonald lent their expertise. Partners such as Interscope Records, the NBA and Live Nation serve as career pipelines, and the center's ICONFest 2025 featured a Sports and Entertainment Summit in partnership with Monumental Sports. The program also expanded its partnership with the government of Ghana for panel conversations and artist exchanges as part of Ghana Week in Washington, D.C., and the West Africa Music & Arts Festival in Accra, Ghana.

EVENT In partnership with Howard's School of Business, the center launched a free summer institute program that hosted 40 high school students from across the country.

Kennesaw State University

**The Joel A. Katz Music and Entertainment Business Program
Kennesaw, Ga.**

Part of the Michael J. Coles College of Business, the Katz program — endowed by renowned entertainment attorney Joel A. Katz, who died in April — is a 24-credit certificate program and an 18-credit undergraduate minor where students can focus on areas such as audio production, artist, venue, live-event management and entertainment entrepreneurship. Courses are taught by entertainment industry executives, professional actors and recording artists. Two members of Zac Brown Band — guitarist Coy Bowles and vocalist/multi-instrumentalist/songwriter John Driskell Hopkins — are current artists-in-residence. Off campus, the Music and Entertainment Business Program's externship offering enables students to participate in three semester-long externships while in the program that have led to job placements at companies including Sony Music, Greenberg Traurig, Live Nation, Sixthman, Topeka, Red Light Management and Coca-Cola Studios.

FACULTY Bryan Calhoun, director of artist marketing and industry relations for Pandora Media and head of digital strategy for Blueprint Group/Maverick, serves as executive-in-residence. Calhoun has developed digital strategies for Lil Wayne, Nicki Minaj, T.I. and The Roots.

Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts

Liverpool, England

A dream fulfilled for Paul McCartney, who launched the school in 1996 with Mark Featherstone-Witty (who retired as principal/CEO in 2021 and was succeeded by Sean McNamara), LIPA offers students the opportunity to pursue a bachelor of arts degree and a master's degree in music industry management. Those candidates train alongside musicians, dancers, engineers, producers, technicians, designers and filmmakers in LIPA's world-class

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McCartney and Springsteen (center) with LIPA students in June.

From left: Scott Borchetta College of Media and Entertainment dean Beverly Keel; singer-songwriter Carly Pearce; Borchetta and his wife, Sandi; and MTSU president Sidney A. McPhee in August.



facilities. The school’s distinctive mix of performers and practitioners provides everything students need to create, produce and manage fully realized productions and projects. LIPA’s three-week, student-run music festival, Zube Xtra, is held in the school’s flagship venue, the Paul McCartney Auditorium. In their final year, bachelor of arts students complete a three-month industry placement tailored to their career ambitions — placements that often lead directly to employment. Recent placements have included roles with Various Artists Management, Warner Music, Live Nation and Blackstar Amplification.

EVENT While visiting LIPA in June, Bruce Springsteen was given a tour of the campus by McCartney and took part in an hourlong Q&A session with students.

Long Island University

The Roc Nation School of Music, Sports and Entertainment
Brooklyn

Long Island University’s Roc Nation School of Music, Sports and Entertainment continues to expand its facilities while still offering its Hope Scholarship, which covers full tuition for 25% of enrolled students from each incoming class. (It does not cover room and board and additional costs.) Most recently, the school unveiled a state-of-the-art Dolby Atmos studio — one of the largest of its

kind in New York — providing learning opportunities for students pursuing careers as producers, engineers, sound designers and more. The school also expanded its partnership with JPMorgan Chase to bolster its financial education curriculum in partnership with the Money Smart Financial Coaching Program. Grammy-nominated rapper Cordae, Empire president Tina Davis, RIAA president/COO Michele Ballantyne and HartBeat CEO Thai Randolph are among recent speakers, and off campus, students partake in a robust internship program that’s included placements at Universal Music Publishing Group, Interscope Records, iHeartMedia, Live Nation and SiriusXM.

COURSE Music Entrepreneurship guides students through developing business proposals and includes the New Venture Pitch Off, which enables students to present their ideas to executives from companies including Universal Music Group and Live Nation.

Los Angeles College of Music

Los Angeles

LACM offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees in performance, composition, music business and music production — and each degree program focuses on three essential elements: craft, business and technology. Across all areas of study, LACM believes students must be well

trained in how the music industry functions and also must have core production skills to succeed. Many of the faculty members are active in the industry, working as music supervisors, entertainment attorneys, artist managers, touring players and more. Their input enables the curriculum to be consistently updated to keep pace with the demands of the music industry. Beyond coursework, students take part in numerous field trips to companies in the greater L.A. area. Recent company visits have included Spotify, Warner Music Group, East West Studio, Sony Music Publishing, Disney and Warner Chappell Music. Recent speakers on campus have included music journalist/author Katherine Turman and Nic Harcourt, former editor-at-large for music and culture at *Los Angeles Times Magazine*.

COURSE Music Licensing & Song Placement Practicum is taught by new music business program faculty member Angela Sheik, a film/TV composer and former executive manager for the Guild of Music Supervisors.

Los Angeles Film School

The Los Angeles Recording School
Los Angeles

Located in the heart of Hollywood and offering both an associate of science degree in audio production and music production and a bachelor of science in audio production, entertainment business, music production and media communications, The Los Angeles Recording School, a division of The Los Angeles Film School, prepares students for every stage of the production process. The music business program covers topics including marketing strategies, brand development, A&R and tour management. Augmenting the curriculum, a TechKit — a bundle of industry-standard software, equipment and tools designed to support remote learning — is given to each student. Students also benefit from access to entertainment professionals who regularly visit campus. In May, the Alumni Mentorship Event brought together current students and distinguished graduates. Earlier in the year, the Entertainment Business Department welcomed sound mixer Thomas Cruley, who offered insight into his work in film and music production.

ALUM Grammy-winning audio engineer Henrique Andrade worked on Beyoncé’s *Cowboy Carter*, as well as Colombian songwriter Juanes’ debut album and Zayn Malik’s second full-length.

Loyola University

School of Music & Theatre Professions
New Orleans

The curriculum of the School of Music & Theatre Professions at Loyola Univer-

sity continues to evolve for students seeking careers in the music industry. Its new entrepreneurship hub, Wolfmoon Entertainment, provides opportunities for students to build businesses in music publishing and synch licensing, label operations, venue management, graphic design, music booking, digital radio streaming and more. This year, the Music Industry Program teamed with a private firm to purchase and revitalize New Orleans music venue Gasa Gasa, and students in the upper-level course Venue Management II will book, market, manage and produce artists and other projects at the venue. Among recent speakers, members of the band (and alums) The Revivalists joined a master class to share thoughts on the live-performance business and trio The Nth Power performed and shared insights.

FACULTY Tavia Osbey, artist manager for acts including Tank & The Bangas and co-founder of Midcitizen Entertainment, is now helming the Music Management class. Sami Slovy, a live-event industry pro, developed the course Business of Live Entertainment.

Middle Tennessee State University

Scott Borchetta College of Media and Entertainment
Murfreesboro, Tenn.

In August, MTSU celebrated the new name of the Scott Borchetta College of Media and Entertainment, recognizing the deep support of the program by the Big Machine Label Group founder and chairman/CEO. The college offers multiple degrees including a bachelor of science in recording industry/music business concentration — all with a strong focus on practical experience. The Recording Industry Department facilitates frequent opportunities for students to collaborate with others studying film, TV, game development, journalism, digital media and more. Students have produced live concert streams on Hulu for Bonnaroo, handled sound reinforcement for concerts and athletic events, and worked at the Grammys, SXSW, the Country Music Association Awards and AmericanaFest. More than 60 speakers visited the program during the 2024-25 academic year — including veteran record producer/mixing engineer Bob Clearmountain — and career fairs attracted 35 companies to campus each semester.

COURSE Students taking the class Living in James Brown’s America: From Doo-Wop to Hip-Hop curated a museum exhibit about the life and legacy of Brown. The exhibit was awarded best temporary exhibit by the Tennessee Association of Museums.

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Monmouth University

West Long Branch, N.J.

Monmouth University’s music industry program blends business and music coursework, offering an interdisciplinary foundation for a variety of careers in the field. Students gain experience as A&R representatives, managers, producers, promotional content creators and artists through Blue Hawk Records, the student-run label that releases a new compilation each semester and dovetails with the course Record Label Strategies. Students also curate and stage events for the Bruce Springsteen Archives & Center for American Music, which broke ground in 2024 on a 30,000-square-foot facility. They also benefit from frequent guest speakers including Atlantic Records senior director of digital marketing Erin Munezza and DreamWorks manager of music Matt Manna.

EVENT On Sept. 6, the Bruce Springsteen Archives & Center for American Music hosted a full-day symposium on the 50th anniversary of the release of *Born To Run*, featuring panels, presentations and interviews with members of Springsteen’s E Street Band, as well as performances by Springsteen of “Thunder Road” and “Born To Run.”

New York University

Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development
New York

NYU’s Steinhardt School launched the Sony Audio Institute in March to foster

interdisciplinary research and collaboration at the intersection of technology, music and business. The groundbreaking endeavor, led by NYU music business professor Larry Miller, gives students access to researchers who are inventing the future and business executives who will bring their discoveries to market. (Miller was named the 2024 music business educator of the year by the Music Business Association.) Combining a curriculum featuring courses in the business of recorded music, publishing, management and fan engagement, the institute provides students a competitive advantage by training them in all areas of a fast-changing industry. Among the guest speakers this past year were Republic Records co-founders Monte and Avery Lipman, Sony Music Publishing chairman/CEO Jon Platt and UTA partner/co-head of global music Samantha Kirby Yoh.

COURSE Corporate Finance & Valuation in the Music Industry, taught by new adjunct faculty member and Apollo Global managing director Paul Sipio, addresses the financialization of music that has attracted investment by private equity and other major funds.

New York University

Tisch School of the Arts
Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music
New York

The Clive Davis Institute combines music production, songwriting and liberal arts studies in a holistic curriculum that gives equal weight to creativity, business skills and professional development. Located on NYU’s Downtown Brooklyn campus, the

institute offers a state-of-the-art facility containing six recording studios including Oscilloscope, the Beastie Boys’ studio that was donated and rebuilt on campus; live-music venue The Garage; and the Clive Davis Gallery. It draws faculty, adjunct professors and artists-in-residence — including, recently, Joey Bada\$\$ — with deep experience. In the spring, executive-in-residence and former Atlantic Music Group CEO Julie Greenwald provided students with feedback in marketing and business classes and held office hours. Students create a Professional Development Portfolio, including business, marketing and funding strategies, which they present to industry professionals as part of their graduation requirements.

COURSE Two-time Grammy-winning A&R executive Pete Ganbarg (Atlantic, Pure Tone Records) teaches the new course A&R: Past, Present and Future, where students learn the history of A&R and pitch artists for potential signing to Pure Tone.

Northeastern University

College of Arts, Music and Design
Boston

Steeped in experiential learning, Northeastern’s music industry program serves students with an interest in all facets of the music industry, from label operations to publishing to emerging technologies. Through professional co-op placements, most music undergraduates complete at least one paid six-month co-operative education stint at a major industry company, and in February, the program launched Amplify NYC, a three-day networking

experience that connected students with alums. Plans are in the works to expand next year to other cities including Nashville, Atlanta and Los Angeles. Also, in 2026, the program will host the Boston season of *How To Build a Sustainable Music Career and Collect All Revenue Streams*, a podcast created by alum Emily White, partner at Collective Entertainment and founder of the #iVoted Festival. The student-run label Green Line Records was featured on NPR’s *World Cafe* and is the home of Good Dog Licensing, which allows students to act as music supervisors.

ALUMS Atlantic Music Group CEO Elliot Grainge and Drew Simmons, partner at Foundations Management, where he manages the careers of Noah Kahan and Chappell Roan.

Occidental College

The John Branca Institute for Music
Los Angeles

The past academic year brought the launch of the John Branca Institute for Music, endowed by alum and music attorney John Branca with a \$5 million gift to the school. (The Mike Curb Foundation has gifted another \$500,000 to the institute.) With David Kasunic, associate professor of music at Occidental, as its director, the institute is dedicated to bringing personnel, opportunities and knowledge of the music business to students. Other noteworthy alums include former Warner Music CEO Steve Cooper and AMR Music Rights partner Tamara Conniff. One of the institute’s principal partnerships is with the Harvard Negotiation Project, where students work directly with Harvard Business School professors on research projects involving music negotiations. This past year, the course Directed Research focused on Branca’s negotiations involving the Michael Jackson estate. Participating students presented their work in a spring public forum highlighting faculty and student research collaborations.

SPEAKER To launch the partnership with the Harvard Negotiation Project, Harvard Business School founder and director James Sebenius gave a 90-minute workshop for students.

Oklahoma State University

Greenwood School of Music
Stillwater, Okla.

Located in the town where alum Garth Brooks got his start, the Greenwood School of Music at OSU offers a bachelor of science in music industry that draws students interested in production, songwriting, publishing, live entertainment, entrepreneurship and musical products. Extracurricular activities include the student-run music company Poke U, and for the third time, students this past



Greenwald (left) and Apple Music’s Zane Lowe at NYU’s Clive Davis Institute in April.

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year organized and promoted their annual festival, Stillstock. The McKnight Center for the Performing Arts, which adjoins the new Greenwood School facilities, has enabled the New York Philharmonic residency to take place in Stillwater, and this year the Chicago Symphony Orchestra performed and worked with students. Music industry majors also have access to four studios. The program's capstone is a required internship, which often becomes students' first job after graduation, and music industry majors can start an MBA program their senior year.

FACULTY Engineer-producer Luke Tallon, whose engineering credits include TV shows *Family Guy*, *Reservation Dogs* and *Tulsa King* and the Martin Scorsese movie *Killers of the Flower Moon*, recently joined the school.

Rhodes College

Mike Curb Institute for Music
Memphis

Founded in 2006, the Mike Curb Institute draws upon the distinct musical traditions of Memphis and the South. More than 75 students each year attend the institute, which uses the strong liberal arts focus of Rhodes College as a foundation for music and entertainment-based education. Rhodes offers certificates in music industry studies in the areas of content production and arts entrepreneurship, and the institute offers experiential opportunities through the Curb Community Fellows Program, which provides funding for students to work with local professionals and organizations such as Goner Records, Royal Studios, the Memphis Music Initiative and the STAX Museum of American Soul Music. Other offerings include Dredge, a student-produced zine and social media platform that looks at the broader arts and industry scene in Memphis, and Audubon Sessions, a student-produced concert series.

EVENT During the 2024-25 academic year, Grammy- and Emmy-winning percussionist-producer Shelia E. spoke about her life and career, performed with student musicians and participated in master classes with students.

Rowan University

College of Performing Arts
Glassboro, N.J.

Rowan University's music industry program is a launching pad for a career in the business backed by a network of accomplished alums, industry-leading faculty and business-related experiences beginning as early as the first semester. The bachelor of science degree program offers concentrations in both technology and business, and Rowan's proximity to both New York and Philadelphia enables



Grammy- and Emmy-winning percussionist-producer **Shelia E.** spoke about her life and career and participated in master classes with students at the Mike Curb Institute for Music at Rhodes College.

students to gain industry and event experience in top markets. In 2025, the music industry program debuted Red Oak Records, an independent, student-operated label complete with marketing, distribution and social media departments. An annual career fair attracts top industry employers to campus, and recent speakers include Kristal Oliver, songwriter for Mary J. Blige and Justin Timberlake, and Ali "AMAC" McGuire, hit-making mixing engineer/vocal producer.

FACULTY Steve Feinberg brings more than 20 years of experience as an artist manager and is best known for discovering and managing global acts including Good Charlotte and My Morning Jacket and consulting for Duran Duran.

State University of New York, Oneonta

Oneonta, N.Y.

All music industry majors at SUNY Oneonta must complete a curriculum that includes five core courses, a series of courses in the SUNY Oneonta School of Business and general education courses relevant to nonperforming roles in the music business. In addition to courses such as Music Industry Communications and Commerce and Consumerism in Popular Music, students participate in multiple extracurriculars including the Music Industry Club, which produces

concerts and seminars and runs the label Red Dragon Records; the Songwriters Club; and campus radio station WONY. Students also have access to a suite of state-of-the-art studios for studying music production as well as studio operations, studio management and other technical, managerial and logistics skills. The program provides a continuing series of alum presentations on campus as well as Backpacks to Briefcases, a series of networking trips to Manhattan, where students meet with alums serving as top executives at music, media and entertainment firms.

ALUM Veteran business manager and Cal Financial Group founder Rit Venerus has provided SUNY Oneonta students with access to major acts including John Mayer and the Dave Matthews Band.

Syracuse University

The Bandier Program for Recording and Entertainment Industries
Syracuse, N.Y.

The Bandier program, part of the Newhouse School of Public Communications, provides a close-knit community and industry-facing curriculum with all the benefits of a university setting. The weekly David M. Rezak Music Business Lecture series brings together top executives with students for networking, dinner and conversation. Guests this past

year included alum and CAA managing director Rob Light and Partisan Records COO Zena White. Last December, a panel of five Bandier alums who work for Island Records discussed their roles in working with Sabrina Carpenter and Chappell Roan. In May, the program continued its tradition of taking students on emerging-market immersion trips. Program director Bill Werde led 13 students to explore the Latin music industry in Mexico, Colombia and Brazil, including a meeting with Karol G's management team in Medellín, Colombia. This year saw the launch of a Bandier alum advisory board, featuring industry executives who graduated from Syracuse and Bandier, including chair Jon Cohen, co-founder and CEO of *The Fader*/Cornerstone.

COURSE The Bandier program recruited alum and mtheory senior vp of marketing Kaitlyn Moore to teach Social Media and Data for the Music Business.

Temple University

Klein College of Media and Communication
Philadelphia

Klein College's new home, the Caroline Kimmel Pavilion for Arts and Communication, will open in fall 2027, supported by a \$27.5 million endowment from businessman and philanthropist Sidney Kimmel and his wife, Caroline, the largest single gift in Temple's history. The pavilion will include a reconstruction of Philadelphia's iconic Sigma Sound Studio 1. Klein's interdisciplinary bachelor of arts in audio and live entertainment combines courses in the schools of communication, music, business and event management. Students can work for the student-run label, Bell Tower Music, and intern at companies including Concord, Red Light Management, Primary Wave, Universal and Live Nation. Those enrolled in the course Life and Work in Music City spent spring break in Nashville visiting Blackbird Studio, Sony Music, East Iris Studios, UMG's 1824 and Neon Coast, arranged by Klein alum and jump. global CEO Nick Maiale. On campus, recent speakers included Sony Music Entertainment senior vp of commercial partnerships Jennifer Fowler.

ALUMS Ruffhouse Records founders the "Butcher Brothers," Joe and Phil Nicolo. Phil returned to teach Klein's mixing classes.



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Tennessee State University Commercial Music Program Nashville

Its location in Nashville affords Tennessee State University's Commercial Music Program access to numerous resources and opportunities in Music City. Guest speakers are abundant, mentors are eager to share and nurture students, and internship opportunities abound. Many of the program's faculty members are active in the music industry, and past adjuncts have had full-time careers in the business and taught part time in the program. The size of classes — including the foundational course Music Business and Law, which covers intellectual property, copyright law, contracts and sources of revenue including publishing, touring, performing rights organizations and retail — tend to be small, allowing students to have more interaction with teachers. Guest speakers this past year included Sweetwater talent acquisition specialist Jordan Bridges and Betsy Lee, business manager at FBMM, the Nashville business management firm.

EVENT In November 2024, TSU's Commercial Music Program presented what is believed to be the first music industry career fair held at a historically Black college and university, with 30 companies from various areas of the industry participating.

Toronto Metropolitan University

Toronto
The professional music program at Toronto Metropolitan University is the first of its kind in Canada and designed

for artists and nonperformers alike. The curriculum combines music fundamentals with business and production skills and hands-on experience. Students typically tally 240 internship hours, with access to top industry professionals and use of leading technologies, labs and resources. The learning environment encourages collaboration with creatives across multiple disciplines, preparing graduates to shape the next wave of innovation in the industry. Alums include singer, songwriter, dancer and choreographer Carina, who was nominated for a Juno Award in 2020 with her band GirlPow-R; Daphne, who was named winner of the Garage Band People's Choice Award at the NXNE festival in June; and producer Selah Weekes, who has gained attention for his educational music production-related tutorials on YouTube.

SPEAKERS SALXCO CEO Lindsay Unwin, EMPIRE president Tina Davis and Juno Awards CEO Allan Reid.

University of California Los Angeles

**The Herb Alpert School of Music
Los Angeles**

The opening of the Berry Gordy Music Industry Center during the 2024-25 academic year capped 10 years of growth for the Herb Alpert School of Music, which offers the only music industry bachelor of arts in California's state university system. The center, funded by a \$5 million gift from the Berry Gordy Truth and Justice Foundation, provides students with professional training and career mentoring, as well as sponsoring critical and historical research on the music industry worldwide.

The school also has a liberal arts-oriented curriculum to give students a broad map of paths into the industry, with an explicit commitment to social justice. Classes specifically targeting aspiring music professionals include Finding Your Voice, Forensic Musicology, and Music and Data. Warner Music Group finance manager for deals analysis Michelle Moreno recently took the lectern for the Accounting for the Music Industry course.

EVENT At the full-day Music Industry Career Fair in May, students connected with industry leaders from companies including Kobalt, APG, Universal Music Group, BMG, Boom Records, Too Lost, Sturdy, Primary Wave, SoundCloud and Live Nation.

University of Colorado, Denver

**College of Arts & Media
Denver**

At the university known as CU Denver, students learn from faculty with career experience and strong connections within the industry. Whether their aspirations are to manage artists or establish a career in entertainment law, students will find the training, guidance and network to help them succeed. The music business degree is offered by the Music & Entertainment Industry Studies Department, which is part of the university's College of Arts & Media. That track enables students to study alongside music performance, recording arts and singer-songwriter students. Faculty arranges partnerships with local venues and companies such as AEG and Live Nation, and student organizations include a student chapter of the Nashville

Songwriters Association, the Music Industry Student Association, Grammy U and Denver Lynx Radio, CU Denver's first student radio station.

COURSES Introduction to Music Cities and Advanced Music Cities dive into the development, enhancement and economics of music communities, using as templates the music communities in the city of Denver and other locations throughout the world.

University of Georgia

**Terry College of Business
Athens, Ga.**

The University of Georgia's music business program, contained within the Terry College of Business, is all about people and place. All faculty members have significant music business experience, including program director David Barbe, an engineer, producer, musician and writer who has worked with Sugar, Drive-By Truckers and Chase Park Transduction Studios. And Athens has an iconic indie scene with affiliated businesses providing hands-on opportunities for students. The program — which has graduated music industry executives including Lost Highway Records executive vp/co-head Robert Knotts, Warner Records senior director of A&R Brad Beausir and Roc Nation Publishing associate director Kelsey Reddick — hosts a regular series of industry gatherings called MBUS Talks. Singer-songwriter and 2020 alum Megan Moroney recently discussed negotiating her record and publishing deals and building her touring operation.

COURSE Emerging Issues in Music Business tracks trends and technology. For its Microcosm of the Music Industry Project, students start businesses in management, booking, publishing and labels that interact with one another as they would in the business world.

University of Miami

**Frost School of Music
Miami**

The Frost School of Music and the University of Miami shared a centennial celebration this year. What was then known as the Conservatory of Music was one of two schools comprising the new institution when the university was founded in 1925. Frost now offers undergraduate degrees for both musicians and nonperformers. In April, it hosted Shaping the Industry: Alumni Panel on Career Pathways in the Music Industry, which featured 29 speakers including Grammy U managing director Jessie Allen, Reservoir Media Management president/COO Rell Lafargue and Los Angeles Philharmonic COO Daniel Song. Frost's faculty members are experienced



Hornsby at the University of Miami's centennial celebration in April.

industry professionals who are active in the field, and the school's proximity to the Latin offices of many major music companies provides ample internship and post-graduate opportunities. Campus life is rich with student-run enterprises including 'Cane Records, Cat 5 Music, Frost Sounds, a campus radio station, a concert production organization, numerous concert halls, the student Music Industry Association and an active Grammy U community.

EVENT A centennial concert in April brought performances by notable alums including Bruce Hornsby, Pat Metheny, Joshua Henry of *Hamilton*, Jon Secada and Ben Folds.

University of North Alabama

Florence, Ala.

During this fall semester, the Department of Entertainment Industry at the University of North Alabama marked 50 years of educating students for careers in the music and entertainment industries. Situated across the Tennessee River from the famed Muscle Shoals Sound Studio and within a few hours' drive of Nashville, Memphis and Atlanta, the department has deep relationships with recording studios, venues, publishers, labels, performing rights organizations, artist managers, tour managers, booking/talent agencies, producers and musicians. Those connections, coupled with a rich pool of alums — including The Red Clay Strays manager Cody Payne and producer-director Ben Skipworth, a two-time recipient of the Academy of Country Music video of the year award — open doors to internship and job opportunities. Students learn directly from industry professionals and benefit from guest speakers including ACM-nominated musicians Sol Philcox Littlefield and Jimbo Hart, the former bassist for Jason Isbell's 400 Unit.

COURSE Multiple Grammy winner, label owner and alum John Paul White teaches music business and songwriting courses in the program, through which students gain knowledge from the perspective of sectors including labels, publishing, licensing, streaming and touring.

University of North Texas

**College of Music
Denton, Texas**

The Music Business Program in the College of Music at the University of North Texas strategically integrates music and business, enabling students to successfully pursue careers in music retail, labels, music entrepreneurship or arts nonprofits. The university — whose alums include Hal Leonard Publishing CEO Larry Morton and Aspen Music Festival and School manager of personnel Nicole Mendyka — offers a music business track within both



Alums **Joan** and **Jeff Beal** gave the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester in New York the largest gift in the school's 104-year history, which will allow for a multimillion-dollar expansion of the Beal Institute for Film Composition and Contemporary Media.

the bachelor of arts in commercial music and the music business minor. Other recent alums have gone on to work for Atrium Music, GroundUP Music and the Pittsburgh Symphony. The undergraduate and graduate music business programs are designed to allow undergraduate students to seamlessly progress to UNT's MBA in music business degree, which offers a fully online, flexible format option allowing students to balance their studies with work or other commitments.

SPEAKERS Arnaecia Alridge, founder and CEO of A JAM Records and Methix and former publicist for Yolanda Adams, and artist Paul Wall, a Recording Academy/Grammys Texas Chapter leader serving as governor, chair of the education committee and a national rap/R&B membership committee member.

University of Rochester

**Eastman School of Music
Rochester, N.Y.**

In September, the Eastman School of Music announced the largest gift in its 104-year history from two alums — Emmy-winning composer Jeff Beal (*House of Cards*, *Blackfish*, *Pollock*) and his wife, acclaimed vocalist and artist champion Joan Beal — that will provide for a multimillion-dollar expansion of the Beal Institute for Film Composition and Contemporary Media. Students in the institute compose and produce music,

perform and conduct in studio orchestras and collaborate on cross-disciplinary and multimedia projects. Emmy-winning composer Mark Watters continues to lead the institute, as well as North America's first film-music festival and conference, Sountrax, which took place Oct. 16-18. (The event was a dream project of school founder George Eastman of the Eastman Kodak Co.) The Eastman School of Music offers a master's of arts degree in music leadership, focused on arts administration, musical development and leadership development, which can be combined with an MBA from the university's Simon Business School or an Eastman master's of music performance.

FACULTY Eastman alum Dennis DeSantis, a composer, percussionist, sound designer, author and educator, recently joined the school in the new position of associate professor of music and technology.

University of Southern California

**Thornton School of Music
Los Angeles**

The music industry program at USC Thornton prepares students through classroom study and insight from experienced faculty. Facets of the program include artist management, the recording industry, publishing, supervision, artist branding and marketing, law, concert promotion, festival management,

DIY touring, industry ethics, venue management, music and mindfulness, and data analysis decision-making for artists. Students are mentored by professionals such as Kevin Lyman, founder of the Vans Warped Tour (see story, page 50). Solange has been named the school's first artist-in-residence. The annual Music Mentorship Program initiative connects music majors with leading industry professionals. In April, the school's Industry Fair brought hiring executives from Universal Music Group, Live Nation, the Association of Independent Music Publishers and Too Lost and speakers including Reed Matthews, co-founder of American Dogwood (whose management clients include Shaboozey); Virgin Music Group North America president Jacqueline Saturn; and Republic Records co-founders Monte and Avery Lipman.

FACULTY Amy Blackman has served as global business manager for numerous Grammy-winning artists and producers for 18 years and from 2007 to 2011 was cultural ambassador for the U.S. Department of State.

William Paterson University

Wayne, N.J.

Students in the Music & Entertainment Industries Program at William Paterson University benefit from a robust balance between the classroom and the real world; they start applying for internships the summer after freshman year, with the advantage of a campus that is within commuting distance from Manhattan. Program director David Kirk Philp, an artist manager and tour manager, ensures the offerings are cutting-edge. Courses such as Entrepreneurship in the Music & Entertainment Industry — in which students write a business plan, research how AI can aid their work, learn marketing and understand the basics of insurance and accounting — help students learn how to think on their feet. The program emphasizes the live side of the industry and the importance of social media, from TikTok to Discord to text-message marketing.

SPEAKER Joe Riccitelli, former co-president of RCA Records and current principal at Golden Retriever Entertainment, was a featured speaker in the 2025 Music Management Seminar Series. **B**

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